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The life & tragedy of Alexandra Feodorovna, empress of Russia,

THE LIFE & TRAGEDY OF
ALEXANDRA FEODOROVNA
EMPRESS OF RUSSIA

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The Empress in 1903.

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THE LIFE & TRAGEDY OF ALEXANDRA FEODOROVNA

EMPRESS OF RUSSIA

A BIOGRAPHY

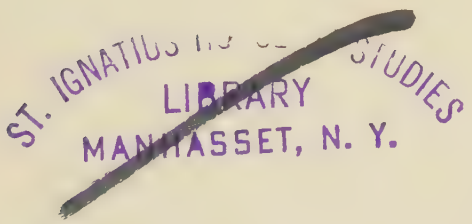
BY

BARONESS SOPHIE BUXHOEVEDEN

WITH AN INTRODUCTION BY

J. C. SQUIRE

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS



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PREFACE

Thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God: Where thou diest, will I die, and there will I be buried.—Ruth i. 16, 17.

In this biography I have tried to be impartial. I had the privilege of knowing the Empress Alexandra Feodorovna well. I knew her good qualities and her weaknesses. I watched her untiring labour for her country and her family. I saw her in days of joy, and in days when the human soul is stripped of all the conventions that surround the great. I have tried to make this, not the formal biography of a sovereign, but the life of a very human woman, forced by fate to be a heroine of tragedy.

The Empress's character was very complex. Love for her husband and children was its dominant trait. She was an ideal wife and mother; her worst enemies could not deny her this. She was a very womanly woman, and not always logically reasonable when it was a case of conflict between reason and affection. Her intellect was always subordinate to her heart. In her dealings with other people, her idealism often made her find in them the good that her own nature led her to expect. Her inherent shyness, which she was never able to conquer, was misunderstood and considered pride. She never acquired the easy outward manner and ready smile that win the hearts of the public, and her modesty kept her from fighting for the popularity that she so ardently desired at heart.

From her intense love for her only son, who suffered from the terrible hereditary disease of haemophilia, and her anxiety for his health grew her faith in Rasputine, the

healer. She clung to him as to the last straw that might prove the saving of her child. The Empress's nature had a mystic side—she was descended through the Hessian House (Brabant) from Saint Elisabeth of Hungary—and the idea of healing through prayer had for her a strong appeal. It was on this side, and this side only, that Rasputine influenced her.

The Empress has been cruelly maligned and grossly wronged. Her want of political experience, her trust in the innate good of humanity, made her commit many political errors. But in everything she did, she was guided solely by her love for the country of her adoption. She came to Russia with high ideals about duty. She believed that the wife of the sovereign is the mother of the country —the "Validé," as the Tartar people called her. She worked incessantly to improve the conditions of the poorer classes, founding schools and hospitals, fighting tenaciously against many difficulties put in her way. All she did in this respect for Russia has never been told and has, since the Revolution, been consistently ignored by all those who have written about her. The Empress adored Russia and the Russian people. No sacrifice could be too great for Russia, even the crown of her husband and her son's inheritance. When she heard of the Emperor's abdication, her only words were "Dieu donne que cela sauve la Russie!"

History repeats itself. In a revolution there is always a figure on which the high lights fall and whose every action is liable to misinterpretation. At such times a word may set the ball of calumny rolling; it grows like a snowball, till every evil, every unfortunate act, is ascribed to the one, often innocent, cause. Marie Antoinette, though her character was so different from that of Alexandra Feodorovna, played the same *rôle* in the history of the French Revolution.

Towards the end the selflessness and spiritual serenity

of the Empress grew daily, and are seen in the courage and the nobility with which she bore, without a murmur, the long martyrdom of seventeen months' unceasing humiliation. Her hunger and thirst were for righteousness. At the last, in her Christian submission to the Divine will, she must have found the Truth she sought, and it was the supreme mercy that sent her the fulfilment of the prayer of Ruth and left her with her husband.

This book is the record of a life, not the tale of daily happenings at Court. These I may some day tell in my own recollections. This is an exact account of the life of the Empress Alexandra Feodorovna as I know it to have been. May it help to remove false impressions given by people who, at the best, knew her only slightly, and in the future may it assist the sane readjustment of history!

I have had the advantage of personal reference to the most authentic sources. The Empress herself, in many conversations, gave me the details I quote about her childhood and youth. I have seen and talked to many people who knew her in Germany and England in her young days. I have been able to read letters, not accessible to the ordinary writer, and have added my own impressions and recollections. From 1913 all the incidents I describe are those in which I myself took part. Previous dates, names, incidents, etc., have been verified by my two former colleagues, the Princess Elizabeth Nicolaevna Obolensky and Princess Marie Victorovna Bariatinsky.

I must beg my readers' indulgence for many mistakes. I am a Russian, and write in a language not my own, without any previous literary experience. I have put down the record of events and my ideas about them as they came to me. In some cases I have been obliged to avoid mentioning names, on account of the sad conditions now prevailing in my unhappy country.

I owe the deepest gratitude to the relations and friends of the Empress Alexandra Feodorovna for having kindly

lent me letters and photographs for publication; also to M. Pierre Gilliard for permission to use some of his photographs and to make quotations from his book "Thirteen Years at the Russian Court" (Messrs. Hutchinson). I am indebted for some quotations from the Empress's letters to Mme. Vyrouboff's "Memories of the Russian Court" (Messrs. Macmillan) and Mme. Lily Dehn's "The Real Tsaritsa" (Messrs. Butterworth). Also to Dr. Ernst Seraphim's "Die Tragedie der Zarenfamilie" and to M. Paléologue's "An Ambassador's Memoirs" (Messrs. Hutchinson) for some extracts. I am very much obliged to Messrs. Payot et Cie. for authorising me to republish some photographs which have appeared in their publications, and to Frau von Kaulbach for permission to reproduce in these pages a picture of the Empress painted by the late F. A. von Kaulbach.

I would like to tender my warmest thanks to Mr. J. C. Squire and Mr. R. Longman for their interest and kind criticism of my work; also to my friend, Miss Kathleen Conyngham Greene, for her constant encouragement and helpful advice, for all of which I am warmly grateful. Lastly, to Miss Grace Chapman, whose valuable suggestions and assistance in proof reading I deeply appreciate.

Sophie Buxhoeveden.

Brussels,

July 1928.

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INTRODUCTION

Baroness Sophie Buxhoeveden, the authoress of this book, was a girl when she was first presented to the Empress; lived in intimacy with her for years as a lady-in-waiting; remained with the Imperial Family throughout the year of revolution; was one of the small remnant of faithful servants who were allowed to share their sufferings in Siberia; was one of the last friends to see them; cherishes pathetic little notes (in English) scribbled by the Empress within a few weeks of her death; and narrowly escaped the Empress's fate. As an introduction is presumably meant to be read before the book introduced, that much may suitably be said as to her credentials, with regard to opportunity. No discerning reader, I think, could finish the book without realising that her veracity, her powers of observation, her intellectual grasp of the events that happened under her eyes, her perception of character, her eye for a scene, and her qualities of heart are as unusual and remarkable as the position in which Fate placed her. We are accustomed to books about great events and great personages which are written by people who have been close to them but who, by virtue of their stupidity or their prejudices, are incapable of recording anything interesting about them; we are also accustomed to books manufactured by plausible journalists with a knack for making second-hand information appear as though it were first-hand. Recent Russian history has been notably the prey of book-makers with an axe to grind, whether political or merely their own. This book is

exceptional: it is a dramatic narrative and a "document." It is a biography: the background has to be sketched and the character developed: the first chapters have not the scale of those which follow them. When, however, we reach the years during which the last storms were gathering, we enter the stage of history. The author had but one pair of eyes and could look at things from only one angle: many such observers, of various temperaments and placed in various circumstances, must record what they have seen and felt before anything like a just idea can be formed of the Russian scene during the revolutionary period. But any sensible reader must be impressed by our author's talent for veracity (a rare talent) and her immunity from hysteria.

. . . . . .

In the spring of 1917 came the first Russian Revolution. As the news reached England the Douma (it had been a name to conjure with, Parliament *versus* King, and was full, to English minds, of associations with Magna Charta, Mr. Hampden and Mr. Pym) had taken charge, a Provisional Government had been established, and (this came a few days later) the Tsar had been induced to abdicate. Those few Englishmen who knew Russia intimately had no illusions about the change; they knew that war fatigue and an incompetent administration had produced it; they were aware that Russia was not yet fit for Western institutions; they were able, without illusions, to imagine what had happened—the dumb, badly-armed millions dying at the Front in the third bitter winter; the food shortage; the subversive propaganda in a population and an army knowing nothing of the causes of the war and longing for peace and the land; the long pent-up hatred of an oppressive and corrupt Government. They had no hope of a sudden miraculous change; peace might be made and a ruling class massacred; but a Socialist Tsar must succeed a

Dynastic Tsar. To the mass of the English population things appeared otherwise. With their incurable habit of making other peoples in their own image, their optimistic belief that everybody everywhere means well except a minority of governing oppressors, they leapt at the news. There were to be no more Tsar, no more knout, no more crooked police, no more Cossacks, no more exiled Kropotkins, no more Siberia. How could Russia, thus liberated, fail to be more powerful in the field ; " mewing her mighty youth " she must surely bring the war to an immediate end.

Some of the politicians had their doubts ; but they had to toe the line. The British House of Commons was asked to pass a vote of congratulation to the Douma on the arrival of the Dawn in Russia. Mr. Bonar Law (struggling hard against his reservations, and taking the plunge boldly since he had to take it) quoted from Wordsworth on the French Revolution :

> Bliss was it in that dawn to be alive,
> But to be young was very heaven . . .

He knew the ghastly day that followed that dawn, and its effect upon the politics of Wordsworth ; but, after all, history might not repeat itself.

From her window in the palace our author watched the ineffective struggles of those summer months of 1917 : the inexorable swing to the left ; the supersession of the academic Liberals by Kerensky ; Kerensky's great oratorical fight (for, since he failed, less than justice is now done to him) on the home front and his last desperate offensive on the Galician front—while Lenin, with his little shrewd eyes and his one idea, watched from Switzerland, stole across Germany in his sealed train, and waited for his moment in Petrograd. What our Foreign Office knew and thought is not yet clear; it is at least reported that Sir George Buchanan wished to give the Russian Imperial

Family (which may very well have refused all such offers, so greatly did the Tsar and his wife love their country) an asylum in England, and that the British Government evaded the offer, being afraid of what the Labour Party (all brought up to consider the Tsar a sort of Nero) would think. That is a report; it may not be true; it is certain that even when Russia was ruining into Bolshevism the ordinary Englishman was complacently supposing that the advent of Liberal statesmen to supposed power must mean a Russia like a giant refreshed, and a British giant at that. Then came the Bolshevik *coup d'état*; then Brest-Litovsk; then the disastrous attempt to bolster up the beaten party by foreign intervention; then ten years of what we know, with Russia groaning under a worse tyranny than the old, and still outside the comity of nations. Still autocracy, still the secret police, still Siberia, and still the knout—or scorpions in place of it.

. . . . . .

The Russian Royal Family, all that time, was obscured. In so far as it was not ignored, it was libelled. As for the Tsar, there was "none so poor to do him reverence"; and the Empress was accused by a thousand journalists of having intrigued with the Germans and of having had dubious relations with a monster called Rasputine. Europe, engaged in a crucial war, had little thought for these people. The Tsar was at Tsarskoe Selo, he was at Tobolsk, he was at Ekaterinburg: the Tsar was one man out of many hundreds of millions, and he meant little. Even when he and his family died—butchered, poor innocents, in a cellar—these were deaths, amongst others: for every wife had lost, or at any moment might lose, her husband, and every father and mother had lost, or might lose, a son. Also, Siberia was far away. Rumour is painted full of tongues and this might not be true; years after the calamity there

were rumours (like the rumours of Barbarossa's survival) that the murder was all a lie and that some, if not all, of the Russian Royal Family had mysteriously survived. That was later: at the time all eyes were on the war: judgment about the Russian Royal Family was callously, even indifferently, suspended. They were murdered; the evidence was slowly accumulated; the murderers were gradually and uncertainly identified; it became gradually clear that the authorities in Moscow were accessories after, if not before, the fact. The war went on: the barrages, the mutilations, the fluctuations of fighting fronts, the mobilisation of forces from the ends of the earth. The Russians collapsed and made peace. The Americans came in and the end was at last arrived at. Now, years afterwards, as principal persons in the drama, the Tsar, his wife, their daughters and their son, emerge: human beings caught up in the whirlwind, punished for things they had not done, ordinary people who, in the eyes of the historians and dramatists of the future, will, with their antagonist Lenin, dominate the whole frenzied Russian panorama.

The Tsar was a better man than Charles I or Louis XVI: the Tsarina was an immeasurably better woman than Marie Antoinette. The Tsar could no more govern Russia perfectly than could his successors; but he was a modest and well-meaning man, who did his best and (though every counsel that reached him contradicted the one before) was very painstaking in seeking advice about the government of his country. Sir A. B., the British Ambassador, told him one thing; Prince C., the Cadet, told him another; then came Monsieur D., an obscurantist who professed a better knowledge of the Real Russia than either of them, and told him a third. What could he do? What he did. During the war he almost forgot that he was an emperor. Great forces had been unloosed; a Russia that nobody could control was in motion; he was willing to be Tsar, General, family man; his wife was willing to be Tsarina,

wife, nurse ; when the explosion came they had a pathetic feeling that something had let them down, but they did not know what. They loved their country, and each other, and their children ; the task of government had always been bewildering ; they had never meant anybody any harm ; everybody who had lived with them knew how simple were their tastes and how disinterested their intentions. And now, suddenly, dirty, scowling soldiers were keeping them penned in their own palace, making foul jokes about them with impunity. And now, again, they were inexplicably, with their invalid son and their gallant young daughters, and the faithful remnant of their staff, being transported to Siberia and jeered at. And now, in a remote town of Siberia, they were being unreasonably imprisoned; wantonly separated and re-united ; half-starved ; grateful for little concessions about food, music and correspondence ; eagerly concerned about the character of the next jailer who would supersede the heartless last jailer. They had been prepared. Even under the Kerensky Government, long before anybody thought of killing them, they had learnt to eat the dust of humiliation :

The guard of the Palace now consisted of the first, second and fourth Regiments of Rifles, to which later a detachment of the third Regiment of Rifles was added. These had previously done service at the fortress, and wanted to enforce full prison regulations in the Palace. It was they who first introduced a ten-minutes' walk, and who saw that all the things brought for the family's use were minutely examined. All their officers, most of them very young, had been elected by the men and were, in consequence, treated as completely negligible. The second and third Rifles were particularly hostile, and every time these two regiments were on duty some incident occurred, some new rule was enforced, or some fresh thing was forbidden. The soldiers who, barely a month before, had been spick and span, perfectly disciplined troops, had degenerated into an untidy, undisciplined horde. They were slovenly in their dress, their crushed caps were set awry on huge mops of unkempt hair, their coats were

half-buttoned, and their nonchalant manner of performing their military duties was a continual irritation to the Emperor. They lolled out of the guard-room, and sat about smoking and reading papers. One day the Grand Duchess Tatiana and I saw from the window that one of the guards on duty in front of the Palace, struck evidently with the injustice of having to stand at his post, had brought a gilt armchair from the halls and had comfortably ensconced himself therein, leaning back, enjoying the view, with his rifle across his knee. I remarked that the man only wanted cushions to complete the picture. There was evidently telepathy in my eye, for when we looked out again, he had actually got some sofa cushions out of one of the rooms, and, with a footstool under his feet, was reading the papers, his discarded rifle lying on the ground! Others, to while away the time, shot at everything they fancied, and the tame deer and swans in the park came to an untimely end. Every man considered himself his own master and free to roam about the Palace, the officers' requests that they should remain in the guard-room being generally made in vain.

There is the dissolution of a society in process; it took place gradually, and even when they reached Siberia the transition had not been perfectly made. Their sufferings were the index of the rate of "progress"; their murder was the "Finis" of the old order.

So, to the future historian, it will appear. At the time their fate was occluded by the larger destinies of nations. In retrospect humanity prefers to dwell upon single figures; Napoleon is more to us than all the paper constitutions, and Marie Antoinette attracts the attention of those who are willing that the sins of *l'ancien régime* should be taken as read. Seldom, if ever, in all human history have there been "tyrants" so humane, so consciously guiltless of human blood, as the Tsar and his wife. The Tsar's last diary—largely taken up with anniversaries, with thoughts of God, with records of his reading (he couldn't, he said, read the Bible all the time, so he was reading Turgeneff)—has recently been published. In these pages we are given an intimate insight into the daily deeds, words, and thoughts of

the Empress, whom he so devotedly loved. She was not so political as is generally thought; and, being Princess Alice's daughter, her affections were centred rather in England than in Russia, in so far as they were not entirely occupied with her adopted country. She would hear no word against Rasputine, for the simple and sufficient reason that when the doctors had failed with her beloved son, the debauched mystagogue had apparently saved his life. Gradually her character as woman and Empress is being vindicated. If there is any partisan so blind that he cannot yield to the sweetness and generosity of her character as revealed in this book, Heaven help him! The woman is ten years dead: massacred in a cellar with everybody whom she held most dear. Must she still be vilified in death merely because her murder was the prelude to the glorious dawn of the Tcheka and Stalin? As for vengeance, never mind; neither she nor her husband had the temper for it. But justice to the memory of a kindly and self-effacing family might at least be done.

J. C. Squire.

THE LIFE & TRAGEDY OF ALEXANDRA FEODOROVNA EMPRESS OF RUSSIA

CHAPTER I

EARLY SURROUNDINGS, 1872–1879

IN the middle of the small, old-fashioned town of Darmstadt, surrounded by quiet, dignified streets, belonging to a time long gone by, stands the New Palace. It was the house Princess Alice of Great Britain and Ireland,[1] the second daughter of Queen Victoria, wife of Prince Louis of Hesse-Darmstadt, had built for herself when her first home proved too small for her rapidly increasing family. For a town house the New Palace had a lovely garden, the site having originally been that of the Botanical Gardens. It was built according to the Princess's own taste and was made by its owner as much like an English house as possible. In that palace the future Empress was born.

The Princess Alice went to Germany as a very young girl. She was intensely English; her attachment to her own country never wavered. She married and left England shortly after the death of her father, the Prince Consort, having been the Queen's support and comfort

[1] Princess Alice Maud Mary, b. April 25, 1843, m. July 1, 1862, Prince Louis of Hesse.

during the time of the Prince's illness. She was always thinking of England, and she built and furnished her new home to give her memories of the home she had left.

"I can't fancy I am in Germany, the house and all its arrangements being so English," the Princess wrote to the Queen on March 20th, 1866. All the family portraits were there, from those of King George III and his family to numerous pictures of the Queen, the Prince Consort, and of all her brothers and sisters. Sketches of Windsor, Balmoral, and of other places she had loved in her youth were treasured by the Princess at Darmstadt, and fostered in her children that love and admiration for England that was so strong a trait in all of them. Life in the Palace was organised on English lines, and was so carried on after the Princess's death.

Though Princess Alice's life was so short—she died on December 14th, 1878, at the age of thirty-five—it was a full one. She saw many things, and judged and analysed them with the wonderfully clear brain on which her contemporaries remark. Young though she was at the time of his death, she had been her father's favourite companion. Her warm heart, guided by her practical mind, gave a new impulse to all the social work of the small country that became hers by marriage. Even now most of its charitable institutions bear her name. The Grand Duchess Alice founded hospitals and women's guilds. She patronised women's unions, when, for the first time in Germany, the question of posts in government offices being filled by women was raised. She was a good judge of men, and had the gift of choosing the right people to carry out her schemes. During the wars of 1866 and 1870 she took an active part in the Red Cross work of Hesse. She founded new hospitals and perfected the arrangements of old ones. With the help of Queen Victoria, she had the newest and best appliances sent from England. "Life is meant for work and not for pleasure," the Princess wrote to the

Queen (August 29th, 1866); but in reality it was in work that her active mind found most pleasure.

The war of 1866 created much bitter feeling in Germany, as civil war always does. Hesse sided with Austria against Prussia, and Prince Louis of Hesse was in the field with the Hessian army. The Prussian side won, and Prussian troops entered Darmstadt. This was a bitter moment for the Princess, then helpless in the Darmstadt palace, where her third daughter, Princess Irene, had just been born. As a result of the war, Hesse lost a large part of its territory, the main part of Oberhessen going to Prussia. This has never been forgotten by the population, and a feeling of coldness towards Prussia can be noticed to this day. The personal relations of the Grand Ducal family with that of the then Crown Princess of Prussia (the Empress Frederick) did not suffer, however, and the two sisters were always devoted to each other.

Princess Alice was a woman of many interests and wide friendships. Among her friends was the great philosopher David Strauss, who dedicated to her his work on Voltaire. Intellectual pursuits were always more congenial to her than worldly pleasures, though she had great charm of manner and as a public duty scrupulously took her share in the society life of Darmstadt.

Princess Alice's private life was devoted to her husband and their seven children.[1] In her letters to Queen Victoria she continually mentions their little ailments, their quaint sayings, and all the trivial things that a mother loves to

[1] 1. Princess Victoria, b. April 5, 1863, m. April 30, 1884, Prince Louis of Battenberg.

2. Princess Elisabeth, b. Nov. 6, 1864, m. June 15, 1884, the Grand Duke Serge of Russia, d. July 18, 1917.

3. Princess Irene, b. June 11, 1866, m. March 24, 1888, Prince Henry of Prussia.

4. Prince Frederick, b. October 7, 1870, d. May 29, 1873.

5. Prince Ernest Louis, b. November 25, 1868, m. (1) Victoria of Saxe-Coburg, Princess of Great Britain and Ireland, (2) Eleonore, Princess of Solms-Hohensolms-Lich.

6. Princess Alix Victoria Helena Louise Beatrice, b. June 6, 1872, m. November 26, 1894, Nicholas II, Emperor of Russia.

7. Princess Marie, b. May 6, 1874, d. November 16, 1878.

note. She directed their education, studied their characters, and guided each one individually. The terrible death of her baby boy, Prince Frederick, who was killed by a fall from a window under her very eyes (May 29th, 1873), gave her a moral and physical shock from which she never really recovered. But she braced herself for the sake of her other children; she wrote to Queen Victoria: "God is very merciful in letting time temper the sharpness of one's grief and letting sorrow find its natural place in our hearts without withdrawing us from life."

The little Princess, whose birth was recorded on June 6th, 1872, and who was destined to be one of the most tragic figures of history, was christened, on her parents' wedding day, July 1st, Victoria Alix Helena Louise Beatrice, her godparents being the Prince and Princess of Wales (King Edward VII and Queen Alexandra), the Cesarevitch (Alexander III) and Cesarevna—Princess Alix's future parents-in-law, Princess Beatrice of Great Britain, the Duchess of Cambridge, and the Landgravine of Hesse.

The Princess was called Alix, this being the nearest possible rendering of her mother's name. The Princess wished to avoid "Alice"—"they pronounce too dreadfully in German" (June 17th, 1872); "they murder my name here, Aliicé they pronounce it" (June 29th). The little Princess had the good looks of all her brothers and sisters, and we can catch glimpses of a happy, uneventful babyhood in Princess Alice's letters to the Queen:

> Baby is like Ella, only smaller features, and still darker eyes with very black lashes, and reddish brown hair. She is a sweet, merry little person, always laughing and a dimple in one cheek, just like Ernie (August 14th, 1872).

Mention of the Princess Alix's beauty as a baby is made in several later letters. On the occasion of the christening of her little sister, Princess Marie (May), her mother writes to the Queen: "Sunny in pink was immensely admired"—

July 13th, 1874. "Sunny is the picture of robust health" —September 1st, 1878.

The Princesses Victoria and Ella (Elisabeth) were already in the schoolroom when their sister was born, and Princess Irene was by herself, between nursery and schoolroom. Princess Alix's babyhood was thus spent mostly with her brother and Princess May. This beloved elder brother, the originator of all their games, was the object of her deep admiration, and the intimacy of childhood remained with them all their lives.

Life in both nursery and schoolroom followed definite rules, laid down by the children's mother, and on the same simple lines as those on which Queen Victoria's children had been brought up. Their father did not become reigning Grand Duke till the death of his uncle in 1877. Both Prince and Princess Louis gave much of their income to charity, and the building of the New Palace had swallowed much of the Princess's dowry, so that, before the Grand Duke's accession, they were far from rich. Their children were brought up in accordance with old-fashioned English ideas of hygiene, which were, at that time, far ahead of those in Germany. Their dress was simple and their fare of the plainest; indeed they kept all their lives hated memories of rice puddings and baked apples in endless succession.

The nurseries were large, lofty rooms, very plainly furnished. Mrs. Mary Anne Orchard,[1] "Orchie" to the children, ruled the nursery. She was the ideal head nurse, sensible, quiet, enforcing obedience, not disdaining punishment, but kind though firm. She gave the children that excellent nursery training which leaves a stamp for life. Mrs. Orchard had fixed hours for everything; and the

[1] She was nurse to the Grand Ducal children, beginning with the Princess Irene, and she remained with the Princess Alix, following her to Russia after her marriage to the Emperor Nicholas, as a kind of head maid. The Empress went to see her daily, when she was old and could not perform her duties any longer, and it was touching to hear the old lady, whose memory had become slightly enfeebled, speaking of the Empress as "my baby," Her Majesty standing by, smiling.

children's day was strictly divided in such a way as to allow them to take advantage of every hour that their mother could spare for them.

On the same floor as the nurseries were the Grand Duchess's rooms, and there the little Princesses brought their toys and played while their mother wrote or read. Toys were simple in those days compared with the elaborate ones that modern children have. Princess Alix never cared for dolls; they were not "real" enough; she preferred animals that responded to caresses, and she delighted in games. Sometimes all the old boxes containing their mother's early wardrobe were brought out for dressing up. The children strutted down the long corridors in crinolines, and played at being great ladies, or characters from fairy tales, dressed in bright stuffs and Indian shawls, which their grandmother, Queen Victoria, could not have imagined being put to such a use. The Grand Duke was not able to be much with his children, but their rare games with him were a delight, and Princess Alix's earliest recollections were of romps in which her big burly soldier father joined.

The children were full of fun and mischief. They did not always drive decorously in their small pony carriage, with a liveried footman at the pony's head. They sometimes escaped from their nurse's vigilance, and once Princess Alix paid dearly for such an escapade. The children were staying at Darmstadt just after their mother's death and were chasing one another in the garden. Princess Irene and Prince Ernest ran over some high forcing frames, carefully treading only on the stone. Princess Alix—who was six at the time—followed, but tried to run over the glass panes. She crashed through, and was badly cut by the glass, bearing on her legs the scars of this adventure all her life.

Winters were spent at Darmstadt, summers mostly at the castles of Kranichstein or Seeheim. It is easy to picture the band of merry, high-spirited children romping in the

suites of old-fashioned rooms at Kranichstein, racing in the park under the oaks, standing in deep admiration before the ancient winding staircase on which the picture of a life-sized stag commemorated the spot where a real stag once sought refuge from a Landgrave of old days. Christmas was celebrated partly in the English and partly in the German way, and was a family feast in which all the household shared. A huge Christmas tree stood in the ballroom, its branches laden with candles, apples, gilt nuts, pink quince sausages, and all kinds of treasures. Round it were tables with gifts for all the members of the family. The servants came in and the Grand Duchess gave them their presents. Then followed a family Christmas dinner, at which the traditional German goose was followed by real English plum pudding and mince pies sent from England. The poor were not forgotten, and Princess Alice had gifts sent to all the hospitals. Later, the Empress continued the same Christmas customs in Russia.

Every year, much to the children's delight, the whole family went to England, staying at Windsor Castle, Osborne or Balmoral, according to Queen Victoria's residence at the moment. The Queen was adored by all her grandchildren. She was always a fond grandmother, and did not apply to them the strict rules that had governed her own children.

In England the little Prince and Princesses of Hesse met crowds of cousins, including the children of the Prince and Princess of Wales (King Edward VII) and those of Princess Christian. With this merry band, they played about Windsor, wandered in the grounds at Balmoral and Osborne, visited pet little shops and had their own special friends among the Queen's retainers. They went round to see these old friends every time they came over, and the visit to "the merchants," by which name a small shop between Abergeldie and Balmoral was known to them, was never missed.

The "merchants" sold sweets, notepaper, and other small things, and the children would come back from their expedition, laden with wonderful purchases, to which the kindly "merchants," an old lady and her sister, would generally add a sweet something. The great delight of the young Princesses at being initiated by their old friend and her sister into the secrets of scone-baking was remembered all their lives, and the tales of these adventures, recounted in later days, filled the hearts of the Imperial Russian children with longing envy. "Grandmamma in England" was, to the childish imagination of Princess Alix, a combination of a very august person and of a Santa Claus. When she returned from England Princess Alix would talk about her stay for weeks and would begin to look forward to the next year's visit.

During the winter at Darmstadt, Princess Alice used often to take her children with her to hospitals and charitable institutions. They thus learned from an early age to enjoy giving pleasure to others, and Princess Alix, when quite tiny, would take flowers to hospitals on her mother's behalf.

Occasionally other children came to play with the small Princesses at Darmstadt, and there were children's parties, but these Princess Alix did not much enjoy. Her constitutional shyness was beginning to show itself, and she always kept in the background.

The friend of her babyhood, who remained her most intimate companion till her marriage, was Fräulein Toni Becker.[1] She and Toni played together as babies, and later shared dancing and gymnastic lessons. As they grew older, their intimacy grew also, till, when Princess Alix came out, Toni was at the Palace almost every day.

[1] Her father had been secretary to the Prince Consort and to Queen Victoria before occupying the same post with the Grand Duchess Alice. "Toni" was a lively, pretty girl and married in 1895 a celebrated painter, Bracht, a man much older than herself.

Photo: Hills & Saunders, Eton.

The Grand Duke and Grand Duchess of Hesse and their children in 1878.

From left to right: Princess Elisabeth, Grand Duke with Princess May in his arms, Princess Alix, Grand Duchess Alice, Princess Victoria.

Seated: Prince Ernest Louis. *Kneeling:* Princess Irene.

In 1877, the death of his uncle, the Grand Duke Louis, made Princess Alix's father reigning Grand Duke of Hesse. This event produced no change in the children's lives, but for the Grand Duchess Alice it meant a great increase of public duties, and consequently a considerable strain on her health. In the summer of 1878 she was ordered to Eastbourne, and took all her children with her, going thence on a short visit to Queen Victoria. Of Eastbourne Princess Alix had golden memories of crab-fishing, bathing, and sand-castle building. There were, too, delightful games with other children on the beach, for many of the Grand Duchess Alice's friends were there with children of about the same age as hers.

This was to be the last journey that Princess Alix took with her mother, and the last time that the Grand Duchess visited her own country. In November diphtheria broke out severely in the New Palace, and all the family, except Princess Ella, went down with it. The first to fall ill was Princess Victoria; Prince Ernest, his sisters, and the Grand Duke followed. Princess Alix was dangerously ill. On November 12th the Grand Duchess telegraphed to the Queen: "This is dreadful. My sweet precious Alicky so ill. The doctor at once saw that it was a severe case."

At that time serum was unknown, and the old-fashioned methods of treatment were powerless against the scourge. It was the case of nature against the disease. The Queen sent her own doctor to help the German physicians. The Grand Duchess had a terribly anxious time. Several nurses were called in, but, according to her wont, when any of her family were ill, she undertook the nursing herself. She sat up whole nights with her children, going from one sick-bed to the other. All, except Princess Victoria, were desperately ill. Princess Alix always remembered calling night after night for her mother, who invariably appeared, whatever the hour, to soothe and

quiet the child.[1] In spite of all her devotion the "baby," Princess May, died on November 16th. The other children the Grand Duchess kept from the jaws of death, but her own weakened constitution could fight the infection no longer. On December 8th she fell ill in her turn, and on December 14th she died, greatly lamented, both in Hesse and in England, while to her own family her death was a shattering blow.

[1] The Grand Duchess had the gift of nursing, and had not only nursed all her children through their various illnesses, but had, as quite a young girl, nursed the Prince Consort through his last illness, and had been called to her favourite brother, the Prince of Wales, when he was dangerously ill with typhoid.

CHAPTER II

CHILDHOOD, 1879–1888

PRINCESS ALIX used to say, in after years, that her earliest recollections were of an unclouded, happy babyhood, of perpetual sunshine, then of a great cloud. . . . The Grand Duchess Alice's death left an inexpressible void in the Palace. It took a long time before those in it could adjust themselves to a life which had lost the hand that guided it. The Grand Duke Louis IV had scarcely recovered from his own severe illness at the time of his wife's death. All the children were moved as soon as possible into the cold, unfamiliar surroundings of the old town-Schloss, and from its windows poor little Princess Alix, then barely six, saw her mother's funeral procession wending its way from the New Palace to the family mausoleum at the Rosenhohe.

The Grand Duke did all in his power to take his wife's place with his motherless children. He was a kind-hearted, honest man, with a wonderfully fair outlook on things and events, and was adored by his children. Naturally he spoilt the youngest a little: Princess Alix seemed so lonely and desolate without her small playfellow, Princess May. The Grand Duchess Alice had always had the entire management of the children's education, and after her death the Grand Duke scrupulously followed the directions she had given. She was no more, but her influence remained. The Princesses' governesses consulted the Grand Duke on minor details, but in essentials followed his wife's ideas. From this

time, too, Queen Victoria took a special interest in her orphaned grandchildren. Both Miss Jackson and Prince Ernest Louis's tutor had to write monthly reports to the Queen, whose autograph answers to Miss Jackson show that she went into every small detail and often gave definite directions. These letters express the Queen's ideas on feminine education. They may strike the reader as old-fashioned, but Miss Jackson, while keeping in the main lines to the Queen's sound advice, evidently adapted them to the exigencies of more modern times.

The first months after her mother's death were untold misery and loneliness for Princess Alix, and probably laid the foundations of the seriousness that lay at the bottom of her character. She was now quite alone in the nursery. Even Prince Ernest Louis, who was now ten, had a tutor to keep him at lessons all day, and Princess Irene, who was six years older, had joined the elder Princesses in the schoolroom. Princess Alix long afterwards remembered those deadly sad months when, small and lonely, she sat with old "Orchie" in the nursery, trying to play with new and unfamiliar toys (all her old ones were burned or being disinfected). When she looked up, she saw her old nurse silently crying. The deaths of her beloved Grand Duchess and of Princess May had nearly broken her faithful heart.

Until this time Princess Alix had been on the whole a merry child. She was hot-tempered and ardently desired things, though she showed great self-restraint even at an early age. She was generous, and even in her babyhood incapable of any childish falsehood. She had a warm and loving heart; was obstinate and very sensitive. A chance word could hurt her, but, even as a small girl, she did not show how deeply she had been wounded. This was her childhood's character, and in many traits it shows the future woman.

Queen Victoria, who loved the Grand Duke of Hesse

Photo: W. & D. Downey Ltd

Queen Victoria with Princess Victoria, Elisabeth and Alix of Hesse, in 1879.

(Standing: left, Princess Victoria, right, Princess Elisabeth.)

as a son, urged him to come to her with all his children as soon as possible, and in January 1879 the family went to Osborne for a long stay. Here by degrees they recovered, mentally and physically, and returned to Darmstadt two months later, accompanied by Prince Leopold (Duke of Albany). He had always been a favourite uncle.

The two elder Princesses tried to take their mother's place as their father's companions, and were constantly with him. The sixteen-years-old Princess Victoria looked after her brother and sisters, and acted as mistress of the house. The Grand Ducal family went that first year to Schloss Wolfsgarten, and the new surroundings and the elasticity of youth helped the children to recover their vitality. They returned to the New Palace in the winter of 1879–1880, and Princess Alix began her solitary schoolroom life. She had toiled at her spelling under faithful Orchie's eye; now came the somewhat formidable Fräulein Anna Textor, a connection of Goethe himself, who, under Miss Jackson's general guidance, carried on her education.

Miss Margaret Hardcastle Jackson, "Madgie" as the Princess Alix affectionately called her later, was a broad-minded, cultivated woman, who soon gained a strong influence over her pupils, particularly the eldest. She had impressed the Grand Duchess Alice by her advanced ideas on feminine education. She tried not only to impart knowledge to her pupils, but to form their moral characters and widen their views on life. A keen politician, she was always deeply interested in all important political and social questions of the day. Young as they were, Miss Jackson discussed all such matters with the children, awakening their interest in intellectual questions. Gossip of any kind was not allowed by her. The Princesses were trained to talk on abstract subjects. It was unfortunate that Miss Jackson felt too old and tired, and had to retire before

having quite finished the Princess Alix's education, when her youngest charge was only fifteen, as she would certainly have been able to accustom her to break through her reserve and acquire a simpler and easier outlook on life.

With the thoroughness that ever characterised her, Princess Alix gave her whole energy to her lessons. She always had a strong sense of duty, and her teachers certify that she would always willingly give up any pleasure that she thought might prevent her finishing some task for next day. Samples of her handwriting at seven years old show it to be wonderfully neat and firm, and she had a very retentive memory. By the time she was fifteen, she was well grounded in history, literature, geography and all general subjects, particularly those relating to England and Germany. According to her letters to her eldest sister, she toiled without a murmur at dry works like Guizot's *Réformation de la Littérature*, the *Life of Cromwell* and Raumer's *Geschichte der Hohenstaufen* in nine volumes: compared with these, *Paradise Lost*, which she read in the intervals, must have seemed quite light reading! She had a French teacher, and though her accent was fair, she never became thoroughly at home in that language and always felt "cramped," as she said, in it, being at a loss for words. This hampered her later in Russia, where French was the official language at Court. English was, of course, her natural language. She spoke and wrote it to her brother and sisters, and later to her husband and children and to all those she knew well.

Princess Alix had one of those sensitive natures that respond most readily to music. She "adored" Wagner and the classics, and when she grew up attended every concert within her reach. Her music teacher was a Dutchman, W. de Haan, at that time Director of the Opera at Darmstadt, who greatly praised her musical ability.

She played the piano brilliantly, but her shyness made

The King's Librar

her extremely self-conscious whenever she played before people. She told the author of the torment she endured when Queen Victoria made her play in the presence of her guests and suite at Windsor. She said her clammy hands felt literally glued to the keys and that it was one of the worst ordeals of her life. She did not excel in drawing, but was a good needlewoman and designed attractive trifles, which she gave to her friends or to charity bazaars. Her interest in art in general developed later under her brother's influence.

The Grand Duke Louis IV was much with his children, and in summer liked to take them about with him to functions in different towns, or to manœuvres. Princess Alix had a very great love for her father, and her delight knew no bounds when she was included in these expeditions. She loved her picturesque "Hessen-land." She cherished recollections of her childhood and early youth, and always in her mind separated Hesse completely from the rest of Germany, which she looked on as Prussia and as a different country. She went to Berlin only twice on short visits before her marriage.

Nearly every autumn the Grand Duke of Hesse took his children to Windsor or Osborne, or more often, to Balmoral, for he was a keen sportsman and good shot. These visits were the best part of the year to his youngest daughter. They developed her mentally, too, as they brought her into contact not only with her cousins, but with all the Queen's *entourage*, politicians and notabilities of all sorts. Listening to their conversation at luncheon, her interest in matters beyond her years was unconsciously awakened, and at thirteen Princess Alix looked and spoke like a much older girl. Her English point of view on many questions in later life was certainly due to her many visits to England at this most impressionable age.

The Grand Ducal family looked upon themselves almost as a branch of the English royal house. They

felt one with it, and took part in all the family festivals. In 1885 Princess Alix's holidays were hurried on to enable her to act as bridesmaid to her aunt, Princess Beatrice, who married Prince Henry of Battenberg, on July 23rd, 1885. This was of course a great event to the thirteen-years-old Princess.

At Wolfsgarten the Grand Ducal family had frequent visits from their English relations: the Prince of Wales (King Edward VII), the Marquess and Marchioness of Lorne (Princess Louise), the Duke of Albany and, most often, Prince and Princess Christian, whose children, Princesses Marie Louise and Helena Victoria, were great friends of Princess Alix. The younger children of the Crown Princess of Germany (later Empress Frederick), the Princesses Sophie and Margarethe, now Queen-Dowager of Greece and Landgravine of Hesse, also came often to Wolfsgarten.

The elder Princesses were fast growing into womanhood. Princess Victoria and Princess Elisabeth (Ella) came out in 1881, but Princess Alix only heard echoes of their gay doings. She had been promoted to share the schoolroom with fifteen-years-old Princess Irene, but the latter had her own friends, and Princess Alix was still much by herself. In her immediate surroundings, her two ladies had most certainly a part in the development of Princess Alix's character. These were Baroness Wilhelmine Senarclens Grancy, lady-in-waiting to the four Princesses, and later Princess Alix's own lady, Fräulein Margarethe (Gretchen) von Fabrice. Baroness Grancy was a woman of the old school, upright, honourable, kind, if perhaps a trifle strict. She was a real friend to the family, and dearly loved little Princess Alix, to whom, as to all, she did not refrain from occasionally giving a bit of her mind. The wiry, hardy, little, old lady was incapable of any insincerity, and the embodiment of duty. Never allowing herself a moment's relaxation, she always preached that

"one must pull oneself together," and not give in, either physically or morally; and she inculcated this principle into Princess Alix, who was always very hard with herself all her life. Her outward manner was short and abrupt, and, in those early years, Princess Alix may have felt her more of a mentor than a friend.

Fräulein von Fabrice was appointed Princess Alix's special lady-in-waiting when the Princess was sixteen, and she herself was in her twenties. She had lived in England as governess to Princess Christian's daughters. Fräulein von Fabrice's aim was to guide the Princess. She had high and lofty ideals and was very religious, but, as she was shy herself, she could not help the Princess to fight against her timidity. Her idealism certainly influenced Princess Alix, who formed a great friendship with her, though she soon became reticent in speaking of the things that touched her deeply, fearful of her too demonstrative sympathy. Toni Becker, her childhood's friend, was allowed sometimes to share her thoughts, and the young hereditary Grand Duke Ernest Louis, when he was at home, shared many more. He was the only real friend of her youth, and their childhood's love and understanding deepened as the difference in their ages was equalised by time; and when he went to the University she missed him sorely, for she was again alone.

In 1884 there was great excitement among the young people at the Darmstadt palace, for their eldest sister, the Princess Victoria, who had always ruled the nursery and had mothered her younger sisters so capably since their mother's death, became engaged to her cousin, Prince Louis of Battenberg. The wedding festivities took place at Darmstadt on April 30th, 1884; Queen Victoria, the Prince and Princess of Wales, and the German Crown Prince and Crown Princess being present. The young Princesses were so much excited by the event that this first break in their family circle had no sadness in it,

particularly as Princess Victoria promised to return to Darmstadt whenever her sailor husband was at sea.

No sooner had the excitement of this wedding abated, than preparations began for the marriage of the second Princess, Elisabeth, who had been engaged for some time to the Grand Duke Serge, a brother of the Emperor Alexander III of Russia. Princess Elisabeth had known the Grand Duke from childhood, as he had often stayed for months at a time at Jugenheim with his mother, the Empress Marie Alexandrovna, wife of Alexander II.[1]

The Princess Elisabeth (Ella) was a very pretty girl, tall and fair, with regular features. She was the personification of unselfishness, always ready to do anything in order to give pleasure to others. She was cheerful, with a strong sense of humour, and as a child always the peacemaker in nursery and schoolroom, a favourite with all her sisters and brothers, and a link between them.

After a visit to England in the spring of 1884, the whole Grand Ducal family went to St. Petersburg for Princess Ella's marriage. Princess Alix, who was only twelve at the time, was full of joy and anticipation at the idea of the journey. Travelling up the long ugly stretches of country from the Russian frontier to St. Petersburg, Princess Alix's impressions of what was to be her country also cannot have been very thrilling ones. But, happily, she was interested in everything, and all the young people arrived in a very cheerful mood at Peterhof, then the residence of the Russian Court.

The future Grand Duchess made her state entrance into the capital in a gilt coach drawn by white palfreys which were led by gold-liveried servants. At St. Petersburg the gorgeous marriage ceremonies took place, followed by many festivities, in which Princess Alix, to

[1] The Empress Marie Alexandrovna was a Hessian Princess, aunt to the Grand Duke Louis IV. There had been, also, earlier intermarriages between the houses of Hesse and Russia, and the Emperor Paul I's wife, Natalie (formerly Wilhelmine), was a Hessian Princess.

her chagrin, did not take part. But she was rewarded by the few delightful days that the whole family spent afterwards in Peterhof, where, for the first time, she met her future husband, the Cesarevitch Nicholas Alexandrovitch, and his brothers and sisters. The band of young people amused themselves in the gardens and went sight-seeing together, Princess Alix the keenest among them. She could always join in fun thoroughly and could laugh at some joke till the tears streamed down her cheeks, even in later days, but it was never in her to set the laughter going.

Leave-takings from the Grand Duchess Serge were sadder than those from Princess Victoria. The elder sister had her parents-in-law in Hesse, and there was the prospect of seeing her often, while the distance from Russia was great. The family circle was reduced that winter at Darmstadt. It was made still smaller by the death of the Grand Duke's mother, old Princess Charles. She had had many sorrows and lived a very retired life in her own palace at Darmstadt, devoting much of her time to charitable works; but she had been very kind to her motherless grandchildren, and was sincerely mourned by them.

In the spring of 1885 the Grand Duke and Grand Duchess Serge came to Wolfsgarten and spent part of the summer there. Prince and Princess Louis of Battenberg soon joined them with their baby daughter, Princess Alice (Princess Andrew of Greece), a delightful toy for Princess Alix. This was the first of a series of happy family meetings that were to take place nearly every year.

The Grand Duke Serge was much liked by his wife's family. He was a real *grand seigneur*, of high culture, artistic temperament and intellectual pursuits, though a certain shyness made him seem outwardly stiff and unresponsive. He took a great liking to little Princess Alix, whom he very much admired. He used to tease her

unmercifully, and often reduced her to a state of blushing confusion, which she really rather enjoyed. The Grand Duke of Hesse was always ready to join in his children's fun and liked going about with his four pretty daughters. Princess Irene was now acting as hostess for her father.

Princess Alix used sometimes to be allowed as a great treat to appear at the *thés dansants* which were given for Princess Irene, and in the years 1886–1887 she began to see something of the young people of Darmstadt. The latter year was marked by Queen Victoria's Jubilee celebrations, to which the Grand Duke took his two youngest daughters. But as Princess Alix was not "out," much to her regret, she saw only the procession in the streets.

CHAPTER III

A YOUNG PRINCESS, 1888–1893

IN the spring of 1888 came a great turning-point in Princess Alix's life, her confirmation. She was prepared for this by Dr. Sell, a Hessian divine, chosen by the Grand Duchess Alice to give religious instruction to her children. He was a clever man, who soon gained a strong influence over Princess Alix, whose sensitive soul had always had serious leanings. His early teaching laid the foundations of that searching for "truth" which was the keynote of her spiritual life. He dwelt strongly on the force of the Lutheran doctrine, and impressed its tenets on her. This later on caused Princess Alix to have so great a moral struggle, when, loving the Cesarevitch, and knowing that she was loved by him, she also knew that to marry him she had to embrace the Orthodox faith.

Dr. Sell's words fell deep. Princess Alix's nature was always introspective, and now she began to analyse every action and its right and wrong motive, finding fault with herself, and seeking to attain a lofty and abstract ideal. This made her take her whole life very seriously. She was always mentally fighting things out, always striving to solve deeper questions in connection with small ones, while jealously keeping all this inner life from prying eyes.

After her confirmation, according to the custom of German courts, Princess Alix was considered "out." The great impression made upon her by the religious ceremony did not prevent her from leading the usual life

of a young Princess and enjoying its gaieties. A friend of her youth, Miss Minnie Cochrane, told me she was bright and cheerful at home. When Miss Cochrane stayed at Wolfsgarten, Princess Alix would come into her room while she was dressing in the morning, and there was no end to their talk. Sometimes even at that early hour they would start singing duets, playing their own banjo accompaniments, and would be desperately late for breakfast! Princess Alix was then a tall, slim girl, looking older than her real age because of the serious expression in her beautiful luminous eyes, and of something sad and wistful about her mouth. It was this sad expression, and not her ready smile, that was always seen in her photographs. Superstitious people might say that hers was a face that bore the stamp of predestination to sorrow. Her regular features kept their babyhood's resemblance to the Grand Duchess Serge. Both sisters were tall and stately, and had very good complexions. Princess Alix had beautiful golden hair, while the Grand Duchess's was slightly darker.

The year 1888 saw another wedding in the family, which brought both married sisters back to Germany. The Princess Irene was married to her first cousin, Prince Henry of Prussia, at the palace of Charlottenburg, near Berlin. This was Princess Alix's first visit to the capital of the German Empire, where she created quite a sensation by her beauty. In the autumn the Princess's coming-out was celebrated by a ball at the New Palace, for which the Grand Duke and Grand Duchess Serge came specially from Russia. The Grand Duchess saw to every detail of her young sister's appearance. She wore white muslin, with bunches of lilies of the valley on her hair and dress, and contemporary accounts say that she was very much admired.

The Grand Duchess Serge had extracted from her father the promise that he would revisit her this winter at St. Petersburg, and after Christmas the Grand Duke of

The Empress's first ball, 1889.

Mrs. Orchard, the Empress *(seated)*, the Grand Duchess Serge.

Hesse with Prince Ernest Louis and Princess Alix went to Russia. The Grand Duchess Serge had won all hearts both in the Imperial Family and in St. Petersburg society, and all her friends were delighted to welcome her sister and brother. The Hessian party stayed with the Grand Duke and Grand Duchess at their Palace on the Nevsky Prospect, which was nearly opposite the Anitchkoff Palace, the residence of the Emperor Alexander III. The Cesarevitch used often to come informally to see his young aunt, "Tetinka" (Little Aunt), as he jokingly called her. The Grand Duchess loved dancing and organised all kinds of entertainments, so that her house was very attractive to her young relations.

The Cesarevitch came oftener still to the Serge Palace when the Princes of Hesse were there. He had taken a strong liking to Prince Ernest Louis, whom he had to entertain as a foreign guest, and he was greatly attracted by his young aunt's shy little sister. On her side, Princess Alix had quickly fallen in love with the Cesarevitch. She hid it carefully, and at first, indeed, did not realise it herself. It was only on her return to Darmstadt that she felt that she had left her heart in Russia.

There was much entertaining at Court and in St. Petersburg that winter. There were many balls, to which the Grand Duchess took her sister, who danced more than ever again in her life, several of the merriest being given by the Empress at Anitchkoff. Among these was the celebrated *bal noir*. In order to retaliate against the Austrian Court which had held a great function during a Russian Court mourning, the Anitchkoff ball was not countermanded on the death of some Archduke, but the guests were bidden to come in mourning, and the ladies never looked better than in every kind of black gown sparkling with jewels. There were concert balls at the Winter Palace, and the Grand Duchess often took her family to the Opera and ballet. Afternoons were spent

at the fashionable skating-grounds in the *Jardin de la Tauride*, where Prince Ernest Louis and Princess Alix with the Cesarevitch, his brother, the Grand Duke George and the Grand Duchess Xenia skated or tobogganed down the ice-hills, with the younger members of St. Petersburg society. Princess Alix enjoyed everything. Her smile and her bright eyes showed this clearly, though her shyness still prevented her from getting on easy terms with the people she met.

The Grand Duke Louis IV was happy, bear-hunting in the country or shooting with the Emperor, and all enjoyed the visit so much that it was prolonged until Lent. The Hessian Princes conscientiously " buried " the season at the traditional *folle journée*—the last flourish before the season's end, given on the last Sunday of Carnival by the Court. This took place at the Alexander Palace at Tsarskoe Selo, where Princess Alix was to live later as Empress, and was a comparatively small and very select afternoon dance for young people personally known to the Emperor. It was followed by a dinner at six o'clock. A feature of the dinner was the traditional carnival dish of *blinis* (pancakes) eaten with fresh caviar. After dinner, dancing was resumed; and there was a *cotillon* with presents for all the guests. On the first stroke of twelve the band suddenly stopped, dancing ceased, and the Imperial Family and their guests sat down to a " fasting supper." If the truth be told, the " fasting " was in name only and merely meant that meat was not included in the menu !

The first week of Lent was, however, a serious season. No good Russian went to places of amusement then. The theatres were closed, and all were supposed to go devoutly to church to hear the penitential psalms. This Lenten spirit gripped Princess Alix even then. She loved the quiet days after the rush of pleasures, and the last weeks spent in St. Petersburg were those she liked the

best—perhaps because she had more opportunities of seeing the Cesarevitch quietly.

After her Russian season, Princess Alix began in earnest her life as a grown-up Princess. She received, presided at dinner parties, went about with the Grand Duke, visited schools and hospitals, and played as far as possible the part of *Landesmutter* in the Grand Duchy. "Prinzesschen" was loved by high and low; but the people did not know the suffering every public appearance caused her. This timidity hampered Princess Alix all her life, for shyness may spell disaster to those in high position. She loved dancing, and, when her first moments of fright had passed off, thoroughly enjoyed going out. The hereditary Grand Duke, whenever he came back from the University, was always ready to arrange pleasures for his sister. Costume balls were then the fashion and, even now, the Darmstadters remember the brilliance of a Renaissance ball, at which Princess Alix, in the dress of a Princess of that period, looked lovely in pale green velvet and silver with emeralds in the fair hair which flowed down her back according to the fashion of the time. She always enjoyed "dressing up"; somehow it made her feel like another person, and she forgot her fears. Her face was always serious, however, even when she was amused. Her friend Toni Becker (Frau Bracht) used to say that she was once at the theatre when Princess Alix was in the Grand Ducal box and a very amusing German play was being given. The theatre played a great part in Darmstadt life. She looked up at her friend's face, and saw the same half-wistful, half-sad look, though the next day the Princess had told her that she had been suppressing her inward giggles all the time.

With her mother's precepts strong in her mind, Princess Alix took a warm interest in all the Grand Duchess Alice's charities, both public and private. The gifts she gave were mostly of her own making and nearly

always meant a drain on her own purse. The Princess's allowance was a very small one, and for weeks before Christmas she would work hard at presents for every kind of humble person, old retainers, governesses and friends.

In the summer of 1890 the Grand Duke of Hesse went to Russia again, taking with him Princess Alix, the hereditary Grand Duke, and Princess Victoria of Battenberg. This time they did not go to St. Petersburg, but to Illinskoe, the Grand Duke Serge's country seat, in the province of Moscow.

The impressions received during this visit probably exercised a great influence on the Princess's subsequent fate. If she had not felt that this second stay confirmed the liking she already felt for Russia, she might have stifled her feelings and not have risked marrying into such a different and distant country. All her impressions of rural life and of the Russian peasant arose from this visit to Illinskoe, the only time she ever made a stay in a Russian country-house.

Illinskoe was a real Russian country-house, like those described by Turgenieff in his novels. The Grand Duke and Grand Duchess Serge lived a simple country life, with the ladies and gentlemen of their court, and a few personal friends invited for prolonged visits—in the Russian fashion. The Grand Duchess loved it all dearly. She was interested in the village people and enjoyed being a "lady bountiful." The typically Russian surroundings, the wide expanse of flat meadows, the immense horizons, the vast pine forests, the grey birches of her garden, attracted her more and more, and she taught her sister to feel the peculiar charm of the Russian country atmosphere. The Grand Duchess took her guests on informal surprise visits to her neighbours. They also visited every village fair in the place, to the whole party's great enjoyment. It was all so different from anything they had ever seen. Even Princess Alix lost her shyness. She

felt at ease with her sister's guests at the simple meals from which etiquette was banished, and got to love the good-natured peasants, who welcomed "their" Grand Duchess's young sister, with low bows and the language of signs.

St. Elisabeth's Day, the name-day of the Grand Duchess, September 18th, was celebrated by the arrival of many guests, though, to the disappointment of his cousins, the Cesarevitch, who had been expected, could not come. At the close of their visit, the Grand Duchess took her guests to Moscow. Like ordinary tourists, they visited everything, the Princess Alix in particular being greatly delighted. With many regrets and numerous boxes of sweets—a photograph taken at the time of their arrival shows them surrounded by empty boxes!—Princess Alix went back to Darmstadt. She promised to return, but did not come to Russia again till 1894, when she was the Cesarevitch's *fiancée* and hastening to the death-bed of the Emperor.

In the winter of 1890 Princess Alix had a glimpse of the outside world, of life beyond the precincts of palaces, in the enchanting setting of the South. Her father took her on a visit to Princess Louis of Battenberg in Malta, where Prince Louis (later Marquess of Milford Haven) then held a command. It was Princess Alix's first trip south; it meant much to such an ardent lover of nature, and at the same time she came in touch with people in the simple way she loved. Princess Alix was greatly fêted at Malta. Naval hospitality is well known, and Prince Louis's brother officers and their wives devised all kinds of excursions and amusements. Admiral Sir Anthony Hoskins, then commander-in-chief, gave many parties. Lieut. Mark Kerr was attached to the Grand Duke, and looked after Princess Alix, who called him "her equerry." The number of her dances at the balls beat all records. She was delighted with everyone and

everything, and became an enthusiast about all connected with the Navy.

From 1890 till the death of the Grand Duke, Princess Alix stayed mostly at home, only going each year for her usual visit to England. In Darmstadt her circle of friends had increased. Many of the great princely families in the neighbourhood came to town for the winter season. She made closer acquaintance with girls of her own age, her childhood's playmates still coming first among them.

She went several times to see her sister, Princess Irene, at Kiel, and there formed a great intimacy with the latter's young lady-in-waiting, Countess Julia (Juju) Rantzau. Countess Rantzau became one of the Princess's closest friends and was often at Wolfsgarten. She was a bright, merry girl, and knew how to draw the Princess out. She and Princess Alix had a common love of music and literature, and read and played much together.

Wolfsgarten was a fine old place where large family parties assembled in the summer. Five separate buildings enclosed an inner courtyard. The castle was small but very comfortable. In the great forests surrounding the house Princess Alix rode and drove her four-in-hand. She handled the reins well, and her old friend, Baron Moritz Riedesel zu Eisenbach, her father's equerry, who had taught her, was proud of her achievements.

Between her father and her brother Princess Alix was happy. There was a strong understanding also between father and daughter. The Grand Duke was a kind and indulgent parent to all his children, but he was particularly affectionate to his youngest. He was repaid by a whole-hearted devotion. The older she grew, the more she came to understand and admire his character. Louis IV was essentially a soldier. He had shown considerable military qualities in the wars of 1866 and 1870, and was beloved by his men, with whom he always kept in touch. He took his duties as ruler seriously, and was interested

in politics outside his little Grand Duchy. He hailed the idea of a United Germany, though Hesse had lost so much territory to Prussia. The Grand Duke loved England, his wife's country, and English institutions, and was on the best of terms with all his wife's relations.

In the beginning of 1892 the Grand Duke had slight heart trouble, which was not considered serious. He had a sudden seizure, however, while lunching with his family, and though for nine days his strong frame battled with death, he died on March 13th, 1892, without ever recovering consciousness. His death was a terrible blow to Princess Alix. She watched him day and night, longing for a sign of recognition, for a last word to remember—but in vain. That sad time and the impression of sudden death were always vivid in her memory. She once said to the author, thinking of her father: "Death is dreadful without preparation, and without the body gradually loosening all earthly ties."

Her father's death was perhaps the greatest sorrow of Princess Alix's life. For years she could not speak of him, and long after, when she was in Russia, anything that reminded her of him would bring her to the verge of tears. After his death her sisters stayed at Darmstadt long enough to help her to readjust her life. Her brother was now the reigning Grand Duke Ernest Louis. It was to him that she gave all the love that she had before divided between father and brother.

CHAPTER IV

ENGAGEMENT, 1894

IN the next two years the bond that had always united the young Grand Duke of Hesse and his sister became a complete and harmonious understanding. The Grand Duke looked after his sister chivalrously, and acted as father, mother and friend. The innate motherliness of the Princess's character made her happiest when she could most devote herself to others, and she now centred all her thoughts on her brother. She shared his pursuits, identified herself with his interests, and gave up her life and aspirations to him.

She always did everything with her whole heart, and, in this and in the official duties that would have fallen to a Grand Duchess of Hesse, Princess Alix overtaxed her strength. The shock of her father's death and the fatigues that followed it were too much for her. She was nearing a breakdown, and had to be taken for a cure to Schwalbach by her brother, after which they went to England in August. Her cousins were continually staying with the Queen, and there was always a merry band of young people in the palace. The Queen always hoped that her granddaughter would marry in England. In 1892 Queen Victoria took Princess Alix with her when she visited the mining districts in Wales. The Princess was much interested by all she heard about the life of the miners and insisted on being allowed to go down a mine.

In January 1893 Princess Alix paid her second visit to Berlin, coming up for the wedding of two cousins,

Prince Frederick Charles of Hesse and Princess Margarethe of Prussia. She fell ill there (with inflammation of the ears) and was advised to recuperate in a warmer climate. So her brother took her to Italy in the early spring of 1893. They went first to Florence, where Queen Victoria was staying at the Villa Palmieri, and then to Venice. Both were artistic and fully appreciated the beauties of Italy. Princess Alix was too busy sight-seeing with her relations, whom she met in great numbers on that trip, to write much; still she managed to send her old friend and governess, Miss Jackson, her "darling Madgie," "A few lines from your beloved Venice."

We have been favoured with the finest weather [she wrote] so that you can imagine how enjoyable all has been. It is like a dream, so different to anything one has ever seen. And how interesting the different style of painting to the Florentines. . . . The delightful sensation of being rowed in a gondola and the peace and quiet. We used to take our tea on some island or other. . . . What a dream of beauty Florence also. . . . That view from San Miniato is too exquisite. Now we have once been here, I fear that we shall always long to come again.

However much Princess Alix enjoyed the journey and shared her brother's artistic enthusiasm, throughout that year the memory of her father was constantly with her. Her life and frame of mind at this period are seen in a letter to Miss Jackson:—

DARMSTADT,
June 3, 1893.

DARLING MADGIE,—I send you my most loving thanks for your dear letter and the sweet little book. I ought not to have opened the packet till the 6th—but I could not resist the temptation, I enjoy the little books you send me always *so much*.

We have come into town for Ernie's audiences and I have been writing, trying on, eating cherries and picking flowers in the Herrengarten, which I have been arranging in the Schloss Kirche, as Toni von Hombergk [1] is going to be married to Pfarrer Erhardt there to-day, and the church looked so bare

[1] A friend of hers.

without any plants or flowers—now it looks quite friendly. It is still warm, sunny and bright. We have been rowing on the pond at Kranichstein and fishing. Frau von Westerveller and Marie von Biegeleben came out to us yesterday for a few hours, the visit of the Grand Duke of Baden went off very well last Tuesday. When the Saxons and Austrians come there will be more to do, and I dread it.

To-night we came in again for a large concert in the theatre, on account of the 25 (or 50) years' existence of the Mozartverein here, and the first time we go to the theatre again, I feel quite upset at the idea.[1] Oh! Madgie dear, if you only knew how too terribly I miss my own Darling [2]—it is too hard to believe that we shall never meet again in this world. But I must not make you sad. I am glad that you are going to Folkestone and so will be near Victoria.

A good long kiss.

Ever your very loving

P.Q. No. III,[3]

Alix.

Don't you wish "The Old Man" on a cherry tree? . . .[4]

Many princes came to Wolfsgarten during these years, and Princess Alix saw many in England, but no one had succeeded in touching her heart. She was always faithful to the Cesarevitch, who had been her love at first sight. She thought of him as the hero of an ideal romance, but only her friend Toni knew what was in her heart. She knew that the wife of the heir to Russia had to be of the Orthodox faith, and to her the religious question then seemed an insurmountable obstacle. After her father's death, her conscientious scruples troubled her even more, for she had never spoken of the question to him, and now felt that she could never know what were his views. The Cesarevitch had admired her greatly in 1889. Both were too young then—they were

[1] After her father's death.

[2] Her father.

[3] This signature, which the Princess used all her life when writing to Miss Jackson, had its origin in the nickname which her governess had given the future Empress in her babyhood: "My Poppet Queen No. 3."

[4] Mr. Gladstone. Miss Jackson was a Conservative.

only seventeen and twenty-one—for any question of marriage to arise, and the Cesarevitch was still treated as a boy by his parents. They did not meet between 1889 and 1894, though they corresponded, and exchanged small gifts, and the Cesarevitch heard much of Princess Alix from the Grand Duchess Serge. Both she and the Grand Duke had always wished for the marriage, and she naturally rejoiced at the idea of having her sister in Russia. She guessed Princess Alix's romance, and saw the charm that she had for the Cesarevitch. Russia had quickly attracted the Grand Duchess Elisaveta Feodorovna, as she was now called. She loved the country and the people. She had made many friends and was very popular. Her husband not being in the direct succession, she could have retained the Lutheran faith, but the Orthodox Church appealed to her, and of her own free will—her husband never attempted to influence her—she became Orthodox in 1891. She did not, therefore, see the religious question as an impediment.

When the question of his marriage was raised, the Cesarevitch told the Emperor Alexander III that he would marry no one but Princess Alix. The Grand Duchess resolved to help him. She often talked to him, and told her sister about their conversations. Then came for Princess Alix a time of great mental unrest, her love struggling with the religious scruples that she had acquired without having really probed the differences of belief that she imagined to be so important. Events hastened her decision. In the autumn of 1893 the Grand Duke of Hesse became engaged to his first cousin, Princess Victoria Melita of Saxe-Coburg (a daughter of the Duke of Edinburgh). Princess Alix had always dreaded the moment when her adored brother would marry and no longer need her, when the close intimacy of the last years would cease. She was still hesitating when she went to Coburg for the Grand Duke's wedding. At the last moment the news

came of the Cesarevitch's unexpected arrival. They met, and he convinced her that she could reconcile her religious beliefs with his. Love conquered, and on April 20th, 1894, Princess Alix of Hesse and the Cesarevitch Nicholas were engaged.

It was a real love-match—one of those ideal unions that seem to belong to fairyland, and tales of which are handed down through the ages. Their love grew with their life together, drew them ever closer, and never abated. The Emperor's diaries and the Empress's letters to the Emperor show what they were to each other.

Princess Alix sent a radiant telegram to her confidant, Toni Becker, from Coburg, in which she said she was *unendlich glucklich* (supremely happy), and the following letter to her old governess :

PALAIS EDINBURG, COBURG,
April 28, 1894.

DARLING MADGIE,—Most loving thanks for your dear letter, which touched me deeply. I am more happy than words can express ; at last after these 5 sad years !

You must come and see me, as soon as you can. Next week I arrive at Windsor and then I can tell you all about the wedding, too, and our reception at Darmstadt, where we spent a night and a few hours in the day. The others are all in Church, to-morrow is their Easter.

It is pouring at the present moment, so a good occasion for answering all one's letters and I have not got few, as you can imagine.

With a tender kiss.

Ever your very loving,

P.Q. No. III,

ALIX.

The political advantages of the marriage had never carried weight with Princess Alix. She had followed her heart, and the fact that the Cesarevitch was the heir to one of the greatest Empires in the world was, as her friend, Toni Becker (Frau Bracht), said, rather in the

The Empress at sixteen with her brother, 1888.

Photo: J. Russell & Sons, Southsea.

The Empress at the time of her engagement, 1894.

nature of a drawback. Her relations took a more practical view. Queen Victoria, who had come to Coburg for her grandson's wedding, was very much pleased at the alliance, and did a great deal at the crucial moment to help Princess Alix with her conscientious scruples. Her voice was to the Princess the echo of that of her mother, and brought with it, too, the revered grandmother's authority. The German Emperor was also strongly in favour of the match, and, though he had never been a particularly intimate friend of either, he helped them both, by suggesting a modification of some of the antiquated formulas of renunciation, so as to lessen the religious difficulties for the Princess.

There were great rejoicings at Coburg when the engagement was announced, and warm telegrams were received from the Emperor and Empress of Russia. The people of Darmstadt, too, were proud of their Princess's great marriage, though some of the older people shook their heads. Russia was far away, and the political atmosphere there always seemed heavy with menace to those who remembered the murder of Alexander II.

The young Princess had no forebodings, however. She was intensely happy. The engaged couple spent a few days at Coburg, and went for a day to Darmstadt to see the Grand Duke of Hesse and his bride, and to visit the mausoleum at the Rosenhohe. Then the Cesarevitch had to return to Russia, and Princess Alix, with Fräulein von Fabrice, left almost immediately for Windsor. Here Queen Victoria once more brought her influence to bear. She encouraged her granddaughter to have many serious talks with the Bishop of Ripon, Dr. Boyd Carpenter. The Bishop showed her how many were the points in common between the Orthodox Church and the Church of England, and it was decided that, on her return from a cure at Harrogate, the Emperor of Russia's confessor, Father Yanisheff, should come to Windsor to

instruct the Princess in the tenets of the Orthodox Church. At Harrogate, where she underwent a treatment for sciatica, Princess Alix did not lose time, for she at once began to study Russian diligently, under the guidance of Mlle. Catherine Adolfovna Schneider,[1] reader to her sister, the Grand Duchess Serge. "It is amusing, but certainly not easy!" Princess Alix wrote to Miss Jackson about these Russian lessons.

The Princess lived very quietly at Harrogate under the name of Baroness Starckenburg, but her incognito was soon discovered, much to her chagrin, and she had great difficulty in escaping from the notice of the public, whose interest was sometimes very embarrassing. She did not go about much on account of her cure, but her small niece, Princess Louis of Battenberg's daughter, was with her. So full of interest was the Princess in everyone and everything about her that, when the landlady at her lodgings had twins, she insisted on standing sponsor in person, the children being appropriately named Nicholas and Alexandra.

Meanwhile the Cesarevitch was waiting impatiently to see his *fiancée* again, and as soon as the Princess's cure was over he set off for England. The Princess was then staying with her sister and brother-in-law, Prince and Princess Louis of Battenberg, at Walton-on-Thames, and there the engaged couple spent a few happy days. Then they went to Windsor, where they met all the members of the Royal Family, received congratulations and saw numerous visitors, among them being the aged Empress Eugénie, who had been a friend of the Grand Duchess

[1] Mlle. Schneider, a Baltic Russian, was later on appointed the Empress's reader. In 1905 she received the title of "Hof-lectrice." She at first taught Russian to the Empress, then read to her, and in the last years acted as a kind of governess to the two youngest Grand Duchesses. She was with their Majesties till the last, following them in their captivity in Siberia to Ekaterinburg. There she was separated from the Imperial Family and put into prison. She was transferred to the prison at Perm with the Empress's lady-in-waiting, Countess Anastasie Hendrikoff, and both were murdered by the Bolsheviks on August 22nd, 1918. Mlle. Schneider was at the time over 60 years of age.

Alice, and in 1883 had come to see Prince Ernest Louis and Princess Alix, when they were quite by themselves at Darmstadt. The little Princess had entertained her charmingly, and had been presented as a reward with a beautiful doll by the Empress—too beautiful to play with, alas!

The Cesarevitch's simple, engaging manner endeared him to those of the Princess's relations who had not yet met him. Physically he was very much like his cousin, the Duke of York (King George V), and this produced many amusing mistakes. When the Cesarevitch was in England for the Duke's wedding in 1893, many of the guests at a garden party shook him warmly by the hand, with effusive congratulations, taking him for his cousin the bridegroom. The greatest joke, however, was when one of the gentlemen of the Court made the contrary mistake, and coming up to the Duke, whom he took for the Cesarevitch, begged him not to be late for the wedding the next day. As it was the Duke's own wedding, it is probable that he was punctual!

While the Cesarevitch and Princess Alix were at Windsor the present Prince of Wales was born, and the Cesarevitch was one of his sponsors. Between rides, tea parties, and dinners, Father Yanisheff began his tuition, but it was decided that this had better be continued at Darmstadt. The Queen took her grandchildren about herself, like any other proud grandmother. It was an idyllic time for the Princess, and she always cherished memories of Windsor, and of the brief moments when she and her *fiancé* were together. The Queen had strict ideas on chaperonage and never left the engaged couple alone, which must sometimes have been rather trying for the Cesarevitch! He had brought Princess Alix beautiful presents, both from himself and from his father and mother. The pink pearl ring that the Empress always wore was her engagement ring. Her chain bracelet, with a huge emerald, was a present given by the Cesarevitch

at Windsor, as was a necklace of pink pearls; and the Emperor of Russia sent a marvellous sapphire and diamond brooch. The Empress used to say that when Queen Victoria saw all these splendours, so different from the simple jewellery of her own youth, she would say to her granddaughter, as if she were still a child, "Now, do not get too proud, Alix."

From Windsor the Queen took the Cesarevitch and his *fiancée* to Osborne. Their stay there could only be short, as the Cesarevitch had to leave for Russia so as to be present at the wedding of his sister, the Grand Duchess Xenia. From the Emperor's diaries of the time, it is easy to see how their love was always growing, and how hard the separation was to both. After her brief sojourn at Osborne the Princess returned to Darmstadt, and set about diligent preparations for the marriage, which was planned for some time in the following spring.

She worked assiduously with Mlle. Schneider, and continued her studies with Father Yanisheff. She went into the religious question with the utmost thoroughness. Indeed, Father Yanisheff told the Grand Duke of Hesse that the Princess used to ask him questions on abstruse points of theology such as he had never heard even from theologians, and that she often had him in a corner, when, to quote his own words in somewhat hazy German, he could only "scratch like a cat" (*kratzen wie eine Katze*) without finding an answer.

Meanwhile, disquieting reports began to come concerning the health of the Emperor of Russia. Years of work had sapped his strong constitution, and the army manœuvres in the autumn, which he insisted on attending, had further aggravated his illness. The doctors ordered him rest and an immediate departure for the Crimea. The state of his father's health obliged the Cesarevitch to put off his proposed visit to Darmstadt, and soon his letters to his *fiancée* became more and more despondent.

Princess Alix was greatly distressed at not being with him at such a time. She knew his devotion to his father and could picture to herself his state of mind. At the beginning of October he telegraphed, summoning Princess Alix to the Crimea.[1]

Princess Louis of Battenberg went with Princess Alix to Warsaw, where the sisters parted, Princess Louis returning to Malta, and Princess Alix, with Baroness Grancy, continuing the journey alone. On the way south, the Grand Duchess Serge joined her, and on October 23rd she arrived at Simpheropol and was met by the Cesarevitch.

Princess Alix and he drove in an open carriage the eighty versts between that town and the Imperial residence, Livadia, the Grand Duchess following in another carriage. The whole Imperial Family were gathered at Livadia, for it was realised that the sands of the Emperor's life were running out. He insisted, however, on getting up and dressing to do honour to his heir's bride, and greeted the Princess with the greatest kindness. In the lovely Livadia chapel the Princess took part in her first Russian Church service—one of intercession for the Emperor. There are a few lines written by her in the Cesarevitch's diary at that time which speak of this: "I have been able to pray with you in church for your darling father. What a comfort! You near me, all seems easier. I know you will always help me."

Princess Alix had wired to the Cesarevitch at the Russian frontier her intention of joining the Orthodox Church on her arrival at Livadia—news which, as he notes in his diary, had given him great joy. The whole palace was under the influence of the angel of death. The family

[1] The Cesarevitch and Princess Alix at that time corresponded by telegraph in cypher, using a small code that the Princess had bought. This little book was one of the tragic mementoes found in the house at Ekaterinburg. The Empress treasured so deeply every souvenir of that time that, even in her imprisonment, she had it with her.

scarcely dared leave the house for fear of a sudden collapse. The end came on November 1st. In the presence of the whole Imperial Family and of the Princess Alix, Father John of Cronstadt read the last prayers to his dying Sovereign. The Emperor Alexander III passed away: the Cesarevitch was the Emperor Nicholas II.

CHAPTER V

MARRIAGE AND FIRST YEAR IN RUSSIA, 1894–1895

THE next morning (November 2nd) the new Emperor, the Dowager-Empress, and Princess Alix went to Holy Communion in the Livadia chapel. It was, perhaps, the most momentous day in Princess Alix's life, for she had that morning been received into the Orthodox Church by Father Yanisheff.

The body of Alexander III lay in state at Livadia for nearly a week, while the complicated funeral ceremonies were being planned and prepared in Moscow and St. Petersburg. According to an Ukase of the Emperor, Princess Alix had become "the truly believing Grand Duchess Alexandra Feodorovna" and her name, as the Emperor's betrothed, was coupled with his in the litanies of the Church. The new Emperor was overburdened with work and with the weight of overwhelming new responsibilities. He clung to Princess Alix, and would not hear of her returning to Darmstadt, as had been planned, to wait for a wedding in the spring. The question of an immediate marriage was raised, and, feeling that it would have been the wish of the late Emperor, the Dowager-Empress wanted it to take place before Alexander III's funeral. The Emperor's uncles, however, opposed this, considering the event to be of too great importance in the eyes of the nation for such a private ceremony. The Ministers supported this opinion, and it was settled that the marriage should take place at the earliest possible date, at the Winter Palace at

St. Petersburg, and that the Princess should not return to Hesse.

On November 8th the funeral cortège left Livadia, the Black Sea fleet acting as convoy. Princess Alix went with the young Emperor and the Dowager-Empress in the Imperial train which took Alexander III's body from Sebastopol to Moscow and St. Petersburg. It was a long, sad journey lasting several days. At every large station, and every town, immense crowds, headed by the local authorities, were waiting. The Imperial Family left the train and long, solemn funeral ceremonies were held.

The Imperial Family all assembled at St. Petersburg to meet the funeral train, and Princess Alix's first entrance into her future capital was in a weary funeral procession. It was a contrast to the usual state entrance of a Grand Ducal bride. The remembrance of the Grand Duchess Serge's fairy-like procession must have struck Princess Alix, as she sat in her mourning coach, rocking on its cee-springs like a ship in distress, for the long four-hours' drive. The sorrowful atmosphere could not fail to depress her, and seemed to her like a bad omen for the new reign. The body of the late Emperor now lay in state in the cathedral at the fortress. Services were held twice daily. The endless litanies, incomprehensible to her, the woeful chants and prayers of the complicated funeral ceremonial seemed to Princess Alix like a long, sad dream, through which she felt that she *must* keep up her courage for the sake of her *fiancé*, and her very genuine grief made her show the warm side of her nature to her new relations. But that whole time was always blurred in her memory.

The Princess could, of course, see very little of the young Emperor at St. Petersburg, as State duties claimed him between the church services. She waited impatiently for the fast approaching day of her wedding, when she would be able to be with him constantly and be a real help to him. The severing of her home ties was thus

The wedding ceremony of the Emperor Nicholas II. and of the Empress Alexandra Feodorovna, November 26th, 1894.

(By gracious permission of H.M. the King, from a picture by Prof. Tuxen in Buckingham Palace.)

made easier to her than would have been the case under ordinary conditions. She did not return to Darmstadt, but spent the twelve days before her marriage with the Grand Duchess Serge. The wedding took place on November 26th, a week after the funeral. It happened to be the Dowager-Empress's birthday, and so a relaxation of Court mourning for the day was allowed. Many princes, who had come for the funeral, remained for the wedding; among them the bride's brother, the Grand Duke of Hesse, the Prince and Princess of Wales (Edward VII), and Prince and Princess Henry of Prussia.

On the wedding morning, the Dowager-Empress, a pathetic figure dressed, like the bride, in white, took her future daughter-in-law from the Serge Palace to the Winter Palace, in the great chapel of which the ceremony was to take place. Princess Alix was dressed for her wedding in the "Malachite" drawing-room of the Winter Palace. Her hair was done in the traditional long side curls, in front of the famous gold mirror of the Empress Anna Joannovna, before which every Russian Grand Duchess dresses on her wedding day. The chief dressers of the ladies of the Imperial Family assisted, and handed the crown jewels, which lay on red velvet cushions. The Dowager-Empress herself placed the diamond nuptial crown on the bride's head. She wore numerous splendid diamond ornaments and her dress was a heavy Russian Court dress of real silver tissue, with an immensely long train edged with ermine. From her shoulders flowed the Imperial mantle of cloth of gold, lined with the same royal fur. These robes were carried by chamberlains, and so heavy were they that, when the marriage ceremony was over, and the Imperial Family, with their guests, had retired to the Malachite room, the Grand Duke of Hesse saw his sister standing motionless and alone in the middle of the room (the Emperor had left her for a moment), unable to move a step! The train was so heavy that, when

it was not carried by the chamberlains, she was almost pinned to the ground by its weight. We see her impression of the ceremony in the following letter to her sister:

PALAIS ANITCHKOFF,
December 10th, 1894.

The ceremony in church reminded me so much of '84, only both our fathers were missing—that was fearful—no kiss, no blessing from either. But I cannot speak about that day nor of all the sad ceremonies before. One's feelings you can imagine. One day in deepest mourning, lamenting a beloved one, the next in smartest clothes being married. There cannot be a greater contrast, but it drew us more together, if possible. Aunt Minny [the Dowager-Empress] is so sweet and patient in her great grief. She touches one with her gentleness. To-day was again a hard day, the fortieth day at the fortress. We two have just now been for five days at Zarskoe, alone with a lady and gentleman, the rest and quiet did one good. We walked and drove and enjoyed the beautiful country air. Here we get out but little, as Nicky sees people almost all day and then has to read through his papers and to write. Only tea we have together, all the other meals upstairs with the rest. I cannot yet realize that I am married, living here with the others, it seems like being on a visit. The rooms are quite comfortable: Nicky's old ones and two others with nice light furniture and chintzes we chose. We are trying to make designs for our rooms at the Winter Palace. My two new ladies seem nice—the young one is C. Lamsdorff's sister.[1]

It was horrid saying good-bye to the dear ones when they left again for home—poor Gretchen![2] But one must not think of that. For my Nicky's sake I must be good, so as to cheer him up.

If I only could find words to tell you of my happiness—daily it grows more and my love greater. Never can I thank God enough for having given me such a treasure. He is too good, dear, loving and kind, and his affection for his mother is touching, and how he looks after her, so quietly and tenderly.

No festivities of any kind followed the marriage ceremony. It took place in the morning, and immediately after-

[1] Princess M. M. Galitzine and Countess M. N. Lamsdorff.
[2] Fräulein von Fabrice.

wards the young Imperial couple drove to the Anitchkoff Palace, enthusiastically cheered by the huge crowds which lined their route. They stopped at the Kazan Cathedral on their way, to pray before the greatly venerated ikon of Our Lady. The Empress in later years often went to this cathedral between the services, with one of her ladies in attendance. She used to kneel in the shadow of a pillar, unrecognised by the few people in the church, who did not guess who was the lady who, so unobtrusively, bought a taper and put it before the ikons.

The Emperor's marriage had been arranged so suddenly that no preparations had been made for the young couple in any of the Palaces. Alexander III had lived almost entirely at Gatchina, at an hour's distance from St. Petersburg, and had used the small Anitchkoff Palace in the capital in winter. The Winter Palace at St. Petersburg was the official residence of the Emperors of Russia. It was a series of gigantic halls, flanked at both sides with vast suites of apartments. Since the death of Alexander II in 1881 no one had lived in it, and it was used only for balls and receptions. The Emperor Nicholas II meant to live in the rooms of his great-grandfather, Nicholas I, but these had to be thoroughly renovated. In the meantime the young couple accepted the hospitality of the Dowager-Empress, and it was settled that two rooms (making six rooms in all) should be added to the Emperor's bachelor quarters at the Anitchkoff Palace, where the Dowager-Empress would continue to live. Happily love gilds everything, for anything less comfortable could scarcely be imagined. The rooms were small, and not designed for a married couple, much less for an Imperial one. Their Majesties shared one sitting-room, and consequently could not give audience simultaneously. They had no proper dining-room, which would have prevented their having any guests, had not deep mourning made this anyhow impossible. From the very first day the young

Emperor and Empress took their meals with the Dowager-Empress. Indeed, so dutiful was the Emperor to his mother and so fearful of hurting her by introducing any change, that at first the Emperor and Empress even went to her apartments for breakfast, though this was later given up. In these small rooms Alexandra Feodorovna sat all day, moving into her bedroom when the Emperor gave audience in the sitting-room. But she was entirely happy. Her husband was near her and, whenever his work allowed, he came to her room for a cigarette and a few words, and found her always waiting for him.

Sovereigns have no holidays. Nicholas II, whose wedding took place on November 26th, resumed his work on the 29th, receiving his ministers in the morning, and working with them exactly as Alexander III had done. There was no honeymoon proper; Sovereigns are not allowed such things, and Princes are never alone. It was very, very seldom that, as the Russian court-servant language had it, Their Majesties could sit *en famille*.

The Emperor's day was divided according to strict unvarying rules, from the day of his accession until 1914. The Empress had to fit in her day accordingly. There were small variations to suit special places of residence, but in the main the arrangements were the same. Breakfast was about nine A.M., then followed interviews with ministers until eleven, a short turn in the garden for half an hour or so, and audiences and guests for luncheon. In such cases Their Majesties made a *cercle* after luncheon, which lasted till a quarter to three. Then there would be a drive with the Empress or, in later years, when her health failed, a solitary walk for the Emperor and work from four until tea, to which meal some member of the Imperial Family generally came. At a quarter to six the Emperor retired to work with his ministers again until eight. In those early days the Emperor and Empress then went to dinner

with the Dowager-Empress, after which the Emperor retired once more to his study and the Empress sat with her mother-in-law.

Sometimes in the evening the Emperor would find an hour to take his young wife on a sledge drive far out on "the Islands," a favourite promenade of the people of St. Petersburg. This was a delight to both, the rapid pace of the horses, the crisp snow flying under their feet, the quiet, snowy, winter landscape, were all new and fascinating to the Empress, and these were almost the only hours they had alone together.

After having devoted herself whole-heartedly, first to her father and then to her brother, the Empress now centred her whole life on her husband. Her days were so mapped out as to seize any chance moment that the Emperor could give her. She was an ideal wife, and always true to her childhood's nickname of "Sunny," the name by which Nicholas II nearly always called her. She was bright and cheerful and entered into all her husband's interests, never letting him see that she was tired or worried. More and more she came to appreciate her husband's inherent chivalry of nature, his equable temper and great sense of duty and patience. More and more, too, she realised how conscientiously he set about the work which had come to him so suddenly and for which he felt himself so insufficiently prepared. But on the whole she knew very little about the Emperor's working life. He never spoke to her of political questions during that first year, nor indeed later. It was not until her son was born that she took any interest in the political life of the country. She did not think that politics were a woman's sphere. The woman's duty was to make the home, and she made a real home for her husband and children.

The young Empress's household had been appointed by the Dowager-Empress: the members were all total strangers to her. Her *Grande Maîtresse* (Mistress of the

Robes), Princess Marie Mikhailovna Galitzine, was a wonderful type of old Russia, belonging by birth and marriage to the greatest families of the country. She was a *grande dame* of the old school, and even her outward appearance was typical of a bygone age. She had kept to the poke-bonnet and caps of her youth, and always dressed in a style peculiarly her own. On State occasions this poke bonnet was ornamented with all the feathers and flowers that Victorian millinery loved. This gave rise to an amusing incident during the Imperial visit to France, when one of the pressmen came up to Count Hendrikoff (a gentleman-in-waiting) and asked him what the headdress which Princess Galitzine was wearing was called, believing the poke-bonnet to be a kind of national headdress! Princess Galitzine, notwithstanding her overawing manner —she struck terror into the hearts of all the *débutantes*, at whom she glared through her horn glasses—was kind and straightforward. She was courteous in spite of her brusque manner, but was no diplomat and could not do much to help the young Empress, to whom she became deeply attached. Although the Empress was rather afraid of her to begin with, she afterwards loved her dearly. When Princess Galitzine died in 1910 the Empress felt her loss greatly, and said to Princess E. N. Obolensky: "*J'ai perdu la plus grande amie que j'avais en Russie. Même dans toute la famille, personne ne m'était aussi proche.*"

The male household was headed by Count Paul Constantinovitch Benckendorff. The Emperor's suite did not come much in touch with the Empress during the year of mourning.

Mlle. Schneider came daily to read or drive with the Empress, as her Russian studies were being continued. From the Empress's notes in her husband's diaries, it can be seen that she worked hard at the language, even in the early days after her marriage. The Empress later gained great proficiency in Russian, which she spoke without any

foreign accent, but for many years she was timid at starting a conversation in it, fearing to make mistakes.

Living as she did under the same roof as her mother-in-law, the Empress saw much of the Empress Marie Feodorovna. She was full of sympathy for her, but as the Dowager-Empress had her much-loved sister, the Princess of Wales, staying with her at the time, she naturally needed no other consoler. In her letters of this time the young Empress speaks with tenderness of the Dowager-Empress. The temperaments and tastes of mother- and daughter-in-law were so dissimilar that, without actually clashing, they seemed each fundamentally unable thoroughly to understand the other. Later, as is natural in such cases, people of the "old court" became critical of the doings of the "young court." The idea arose that such criticisms were echoes of the Dowager-Empress's opinions, and gossip was started, mostly unfounded. When, once or twice, slight friction did arise between the two Courts, society made the most of it, but the two Empresses always met on friendly terms.

According to an Ukase of the Emperor Paul I, the Dowager-Empress in Russia always had precedence over the reigning Empress.[1] On ceremonial occasions, therefore, the Empress Marie Feodorovna preceded the young Empress on the Emperor's arm, the Empress Alexandra Feodorovna following on the arm of the senior Prince.

During the first years of the Emperor's reign the Dowager-Empress's influence on her son was undoubtedly considerable. If the Emperor ever spoke of the political situation and of the difficulties of government, it was not to his young and inexperienced wife, but to his mother, whose advice on general questions he had always been accustomed to seek. The young Emperor and Empress never failed in

[1] The Dowager-Empress also had the use of the crown jewels, the Empress having those of the Cesarevna (wife of the heir) and some very large and old-fashioned tiaras of the Empress Catherine II, which were too heavy for the Empress Marie to wear.

attention to the Dowager-Empress, and when they first moved into the Winter Palace they visited her nearly every day. As years went on, and the Imperial couple gave up coming to St. Petersburg for the winter, the exchange of visits grew less frequent. Still at every family *fête*, either the young Emperor and Empress went to the Dowager-Empress or the Dowager-Empress went to Tsarskoe Selo, while Christmas always united the whole Imperial Family at the Dowager-Empress's Palace.

Ten days after the wedding, the Emperor and Empress went to Tsarskoe Selo to see for themselves what alterations should be made in the old Palace that they meant to make their home. This was their real honeymoon. Their dutiful sentiment with regard to the Empress Marie can be judged by the grateful tone in which the Emperor remarks in his diary that his mother has allowed them to stay for a few days longer at Tsarskoe Selo. As to the young Empress, her feelings at this time can be seen from this note she made in the Emperor's diary, November 26th, 1894:

> Never did I believe there could be such utter happiness in the world—such a feeling of unity between two mortal beings. No more separations. At last united, bound for life, and when this life is ended we meet again in the other world and remain together for Eternity.

The same feelings are echoed in a Christmas letter to her eldest sister, then at Malta:

Dec. 25, 1894.

I wish I could slip over and peep into your rooms and little garden—how glad I am that I know the dear place, so can picture you to myself there. Do give Mr. Kerr [1] my very best wishes for the New Year and kind messages. Are there still so many snails on the bushes which you used to have to pick off with the little gardener boy? And have you taken Spiridon [2] without moustache?

[1] Now Admiral Mark Kerr.

[2] A servant.

I long to know everything you are doing. It was too hard you could not be here for our wedding. But how utterly contented and happy I am with my beloved Nicky you can well imagine, and that helped me over my sad feeling being absent from my old home for Xmas and beginning the New Year in another country. Our Xmas will, of course, be a perfectly quiet one, which is in every way pleasanter.

The remainder of the year was spent partly at the Anitchkoff Palace, partly at Tsarskoe Selo. Both had been delighted with Tsarskoe. The Emperor's childish recollections were linked with it, and he had been born in the very bedroom they occupied during their first stay.

Life in town was very irksome to the Emperor, an outdoor man to whom exercise was a necessity. Happily the Anitchkoff Palace had a garden and an ice-hill, and whenever he could leave his audiences and papers, the Emperor and Empress would join the young Grand Duke Michael Alexandrovitch and the Grand Duchess Olga Alexandrovna—then sixteen and thirteen—in ice-hilling or walking round the garden. The Empress was busy with plans for the renovation and decoration of the Winter Palace and Tsarskoe Selo, where she hoped to have her own home and to have the Emperor completely to herself. With the Grand Duchess Serge, who had come from Moscow, the young Empress planned changes in the old palace, and enjoyed creating her own individual setting. The *Jugendstil* had made its appearance at Darmstadt, and Alexandra Feodorovna's taste at that time was undoubtedly influenced by it. Her mauve boudoir, her large, pale-green sitting-room, connected by a private passage in an overhanging gallery with the Emperor's study, were distinctly *art nouveau*. The Empress's own personality was, however, clearly seen in her rooms, in the beautiful collections of ancient crosses, in the pictures on the walls—a lovely Annunciation by Nesterov in the mauve room, exquisite in colouring, water-colours of Hessian and English scenes that she had known

ST. IGNATIUS HOUSE OF STUDIES
LIBRARY
MANHASSET, N. Y.

and loved, beautiful knick-knacks and china on the tables, all chosen by her or gifts from those she loved and who knew her taste. Her friends could always guess which were the Empress's things. Pale mauve enamels (mauve was her favourite colour), transparent green nephrite cups, crystal inlaid with amethysts, bookmarks and small objects decorated with edelweiss in baroque pearls, or bearing the emblem of the Swastika, symbol of eternity—these were all stamped with the Empress's individuality. The things did not always harmonise with one another, or even with the setting. She liked a thing often more for its associations than for its beauty, for hers was a sentimental rather than an aesthetic nature. She was not a collector of antiques. She loved a homely house, with children and dogs about it. She did not like to be constantly afraid for the safety of some priceless object, and the atmosphere of her private rooms in the Palace was, above all, one of comfort. The official reception rooms were, of course, more stately. She was a lover of flowers and nature, and her rooms were always a mass of white lilac and every kind of beautiful orchid. These throve, for the Empress's rooms were always extremely cold, a trial to those unaccustomed to them. Like her grandmother, Queen Victoria, she could not stand a temperature that was even moderately warm. It sent all the blood to her head, even when she was young, and in later years when her heart trouble began she found too much warmth even more trying.

The bedrooms and nurseries were all simply upholstered in bright chintzes. The Empress kept faithfully to the English ideas that had been her mother's, and these rooms were just like those in a comfortable English house. There was no wonderful luxury, but real comfort, for the Empress was eminently practical, and in planning her house saw to all the details herself; and in her home were to be found reminiscences of all her past life.

CHAPTER VI

THE EMPRESS IN HER NEW HOME, 1895

THE winter of 1895 was spent by the Imperial couple in the greatest retirement. At Christmas mourning was somewhat relaxed. There was the traditional Christmas tree for the Cossacks of the Emperor's escort, and on New Year's Day the Empress held her first *sortie*, the equivalent of a Drawing-room, which took place in the afternoon. After a solemn Mass in the chapel of the Winter Palace, which the whole Imperial Family and the Court attended in gala dress, the ladies of St. Petersburg society were presented in turn to the Empress, who described the ceremony in a letter to Princess Louis of Battenberg, dated February 4th, 1895 :

Yesterday was a *baise-main* for all the ladies ; it was rather amusing, especially seeing those I knew in 1889, but when Madame Narischkine, Papa's friend, whom we also saw at Illynskoe and who was photoed on the group came—I could scarcely swallow my tears, it made me think so awfully of him. The deputations from the whole country came twice last week, and were interesting in their different picturesque costumes. They brought most beautiful plates and images. Another day, three Tartar ladies came and brought me a costume. It was the first time their husbands allowed them to come from Orenburg. They need not be veiled before the Russian men, which is odd. . . .

My two ladies at present are Princess Galitsyn, sister of Madame Ozeroff at Frankfort (who will be, probably, appointed at Darmstadt instead of O. Sacken), then Countess Lamsdorff, the sister of Stuttgart Lamsdorff. They are both charming and I like them exceedingly. I see them rarely, they live in the Winter

palace, " Schneiderlein " [1]—my lectrice, now, please—too. She was 38 or 39 the other day. She comes every morning for a good lesson, and reads an hour to me before supper, whilst Nicky is occupied with papers ; he has a fearful amount to do, so that we are scarcely ever to ourselves. . . .

The news from Georgie [2] is good again, after he has had a bad cough again. End of February or beginning of March, this style here, he will go on the *Derjava* or *Polar Star* for a cruise—perhaps, he may pass Malta.

Do let me hear from you soon again, dear, as your dear letters are a great joy to me. I am sure fat little Georgie [3] must be a great joy to you and now that he can walk more. The tiny frames are for Alice [4] and Louise.[5] No more to-day, else I shall bore you with this long rigmarole.

It was a very beautiful and picturesque scene. All the ladies wore the traditional dress of the Russian Court. The *dames à portrait* (Women of the Bedchamber) and maids-of-honour [6] were obliged to wear certain colours and forms of headdress. The rest of the company wore Court dress, in which the wearer's imagination had been allowed full play. The result was a gorgeous picture. The young Empress at her first *sortie* wore a dress of heavy cloth of silver, fur-edged, with magnificent diamonds and pearls. The long ceremony must have been very tiring. Hundreds of wedding presents had been showered on the new sovereign and his bride, and many deputations came to give them in person.

The young Empress found interest in everything Russian ; she read and translated from national authors, and studied the music of the country, which had at once appealed to her. Whenever they had an evening alone, the Emperor read aloud, a habit to which he always

[1] Mlle. E. A. Schneider.
[2] Grand Duke Cesarevitch George Alexandrovitch.
[3] Now Marquess of Milford-Haven.
[4] Now Princess Andrew of Greece.
[5] Now Crown Princess of Sweden.
[6] The Empress had several hundreds of honorary maids of honour. A few were sometimes on duty for a day for some special court function. Her Majesty had only four personal ladies-in-waiting.

adhered. At first the readings were mostly in French, as the Empress wanted to improve her knowledge of the Russian court language. They read no light literature! The Empress in one of her first letters to her sister mentions the titles of the books they were then reading: *Le Roman du Prince Eugène*; Nolhac's *Duchesse d'Angoulême*; *Napoléon à Ste. Hélène*, etc. Later, when the Empress could understand Russian sufficiently, the Emperor read his favourite authors to her, and in this way she gained a considerable knowledge of Russian literature. It was from these readings that she formed her own idea of the Russian peasant. Though not in sympathy with all Tolstoy's philosophy, she accepted his ideal view of peasant life without being able to judge for herself, and realise the whole complexity of the Russian nature—its weaknesses and its defects of character. She saw these distinctly in the members of the upper classes with whom she came into contact, but she imagined the peasant to be different. He seemed to her a simple, innocent child with all the artlessness of childhood and a childlike faith. She was an inveterate idealist. Though she had many disillusions, as all Princes must have, she continued to believe in the inherent good of all humanity. The future of Russia lay, she thought, with the peasants—with the classes that were still untainted by the poison of civilisation.

She became more and more attached to the Russian Church, throwing herself into the practice of its religion with all the fervour of her nature. In this she was encouraged by the Emperor. He was the official head of the Church, not narrow in his views, but deeply religious by nature. Those who saw him in church could tell by the expression of his eyes how sincere was his faith.

The Empress had come to Russia imbued by the feeling that she must do her duty to her husband's country. Duty seemed to her above all to be social work. In her very first letter to her sister, in January 1895, she notes that

she has not yet seen any hospitals. She could not do much that year, for she was expecting a baby in the autumn, and spent a quiet spring and summer at the little seaside villa at Peterhof. This hope made the Empress's happiness complete, and all her thoughts were full of the coming child. The motherly strain was the most salient trait of her character. Every pleasure was sacrificed that might possibly endanger her health. The coming event seemed to her so sacred and so wonderful that she scarcely wanted to speak of it to anyone except her sisters and her old friend Toni Becker. In the autumn the Imperial couple moved to the now rearranged Tsarskoe Selo Palace, and there on November 15th the Grand Duchess Olga Nicolaevna was born. The Grand Duchess Serge came from Moscow to be with her sister, and the Dowager-Empress hurried to the Palace as soon as she heard that the event was imminent. The guns of the old fortress of SS. Peter and Paul thundered out the announcement of the birth, and the population of St. Petersburg eagerly counted the shots: 300 would mean an heir, 101 a Grand Duchess. The number of shots seemed endless—99—100—101. People broke into wild cheering in clubs and regimental messes, but the reports stopped. It was only a Grand Duchess after all!

To the young parents, the baby, boy or girl, was equally welcome. The proud father notes in his diary that "the baby weighed 10 lb. and is 55 cent. long." "It is a radiantly happy mother who is writing to you," the Empress wrote to her sister, Princess Louis, on December 13th, 1895. "You can imagine our intense happiness now that we have such a precious little being of our own to care for and look after." She nursed her little daughter herself, an official wet-nurse being in attendance in case of unexpected complications.

The christening in the Big (or Catherine) Palace church was a splendid function. The baby was taken to church

in a gold coach like a fairy Princess. A mantle of cloth of gold covered her little body, and she was carried in state by old Princess Galitzine on a golden cushion. The Dowager-Empress and Queen Olga of Greece were her godmothers, and it was the Empress Marie, wonderfully young-looking for the grandmother's *rôle*, who held the baby during the ceremony. The Grand Duchess Olga was a fair, fat baby, not showing as a tiny child the good looks that were to be hers when she grew up. The Empress had the cradle in her boudoir, as she had those of all her subsequent babies, and there the little girl spent most of her days. An English nurse, sent out by Queen Victoria, had a Russian nurse under her, and old "Orchie" had the general supervision of the nurseries. It must be said that she often clashed with the others, and caused great trouble to the Empress by contemptuously sweeping aside her inexperienced suggestions. The Empress fed and bathed her baby herself, knitted endless jackets and socks for her, and enjoyed her even more than do most young mothers their first-born. She was devoted to children, and had often been lonely in her first year in Russia, as the Emperor's work kept him very busy.

This was the Empress's first St. Petersburg season since her marriage. After the Christmas celebrations, the New Year *sortie* and diplomatic reception came a series of Court balls. Much has been written about the splendour of these *fêtes*, the marvellous setting of the Winter Palace balls, the beautiful uniforms and dresses. Every Guard regiment had a special gala uniform for Court. The servants and the members of the Emperor's private band wore gold and scarlet liveries, the picturesque "Runners" had quaint, befeathered headgear, something like the ballet dress of the "Roi Soleil," and the negro servants, in Oriental costume, lent a touch of Eastern splendour. Their Majesties' entrance was heralded by the tapping of the canes of the *Maîtres des Cérémonies*—tall ivory-topped

canes decorated with eagles embossed in gold. The ball was opened by a stately polonaise, in which the Emperor and Empress, the Princes and the Ambassadors took part. Except in this polonaise, the Emperor did not dance, though before his accession he had been a good dancer. The Empress took part only in square dances with the partners that etiquette prescribed. During the round dances she held her *cercle* and the *débutantes* were presented to her.

The Empress did not relish these great functions. She had loved dancing as a girl, but ordinary dancing was impossible for her now. If she had felt shy and frightened at Darmstadt parties, where all the people were her friends, here in unknown surroundings, facing hundreds of strangers (to the big ball 2000 people were asked, to the concert balls 800) she felt absolutely lost. She used to say that during the *cercles* she longed to disappear under the ground. All her French evaporated, and her conversation languished; she blushed and looked ill at ease. During the famous suppers under the palm-trees that followed the concert balls, her neighbour on every occasion for over ten years was the *doyen* of the Diplomatic Corps, the Turkish Ambassador, Husny Pasha. He was a heavy and uninteresting old gentleman, whom, it was said, the Ottoman Government only kept on at his post because he was *doyen*, and because in that way the Turkish representative was always first.

In addition to presentations made at the balls, the Empress daily received large groups of ladies in audience. In this, too, she was greatly hampered by her shyness and Princess Galitzine did not help her so much as she might have done—telling her who the people were and what topic of conversation would be most suited to each. The Princess was a Moscovite: she had gone out very little before her appointment, and hardly knew the younger generation. To her old-fashioned ideas, it was sufficient

honour for the ladies to be received by the Empress at all. What did it matter what she said to them? Why *tourmenter la pauvre âme* with details and explanations? So the Empress had to speak in a general and non-committal manner to everyone who came, and these receptions did not increase her acquaintance with St. Petersburg society. Had she come to Russia as Cesarevna (wife of the heir), a position the Empress Marie Feodorovna had held for fourteen years, it would have been easier for her. The Dowager-Empress, with her knowledge of the world, her love of society and charm of manner, would have helped her young daughter-in-law to know people in a natural way. She would thus have created a circle of friends for herself, who would have supported her as Empress. Coming at once to the exalted position which must inevitably isolate sovereigns from the rest of the world, the Empress Alexandra Feodorovna could not easily make friends. She had no possibility of getting to know anyone better at the big functions; and at the Russian Court, where everything was ordered by unalterable tradition, any kind of small and informal entertainment was unknown. Society did not know her, and her timidity was ascribed to haughtiness, and her reserve to pride. There were no young women of Alexandra Feodorovna's age in the Imperial Family at the time of her marriage, except the Grand Duchess Xenia Alexandrovna, the Emperor's eldest sister and herself a bride. She and her husband, the Grand Duke Alexander Mikhailovitch, and their baby daughter Princess Irina (now Princess Felix Youssoupoff), were living temporarily at the Winter Palace. The children were about the same age and always together, and the young mothers joined in baby worship by the hour. The Grand Duchess Serge, whose help would have been invaluable to her younger sister, was tied down to Moscow, where her husband occupied the responsible post of Governor-General; the older generation, the Emperor's

uncles and aunts, were outwardly friendly, but, as they were accustomed to the Dowager-Empress's worldly *savoir-faire*, they did not try to help the newcomer in their family, who in her turn felt shy of them. One of the aunts, the Grand Duchess Marie Pavlovna (Vladimir), was a brilliant society leader, but was much older than the Empress and was unlike her in character. There was a contingent of gay young bachelor cousins, who led their own merry life in St. Petersburg and Paris, but who could form no link between the young Empress and society. Alexander III had always had a big family dinner once a week, but this was discontinued in the new reign. The relations had according to custom to ask permission to call on the Emperor and Empress, and were then generally invited to lunch or tea, but return visits were not frequent and always inevitably marked with a certain amount of formality. Alexandra Feodorovna only succeeded in completely winning the hearts of the senior members of the family: the splendid-looking old Field-Marshal Grand Duke Michael Nicolaivitch, son of Nicholas I, and his equally handsome sister-in-law, the Grand Duchess Constantine (Alexandra Jossiphovna). She paid them all the charming little attentions by which a bright young woman can cheer the old people. Here she was in her element, and she so much endeared herself to her old aunt that, though the Grand Duchess Constantine had for years retired from the world, she decided to attend the coronation at Moscow!

Alexandra Feodorovna's study of Russian charitable institutions continued, and she went with the Emperor to visit the schools and hospitals in St. Petersburg. Official visits did not satisfy her, though she had to put off a more thorough inspection until later. All this spring her thoughts and time were taken up with preparation for the Coronation, to be held at Moscow, according to tradition, in May 1896. Throughout her busy winter the Empress's

thoughts were centred on this event, and on the great mystical and religious importance attached to it by all Russians. The Grand Duke Serge explained to her every detail of its complicated ceremonial, and encouraged her to realise its deep religious significance. The actual ceremony, the general atmosphere in Moscow at the time, the old rites and customs, made an ineffaceable impression on the Empress. They turned her thoughts more and more towards the old traditions in religion and art that had always attracted her, and this, indirectly, had its influence on her growing political ideas.

CHAPTER VII

THE CORONATION, 1896

AT the Coronation the whole old-world pomp of the Russian Court was displayed. It was a glorious pageant for the whole country, apart from the importance it had in the eyes of those who saw in the religious rites the real consecration of their sovereign. Everything was done to foster this feeling in the people who came to Moscow for the celebrations from every part of the vast Russian Empire. The Emperor granted amnesties to prisoners, and bounties to all classes of his subjects: fines were remitted, and facilities given for payment of taxes.

During the days before the actual Coronation, the Emperor and Empress were at the Petrovsky Palace near Moscow, preparing themselves by retreat and fasting for the ceremony.

Princes representing nearly every sovereign in Europe came to Moscow, though no reigning sovereigns were present (except Queen Olga of Greece, as a Russian Grand Duchess), for on this occasion the Emperor and Empress had to play the chief *rôle*, and could give precedence to no one. All the Embassies had migrated to the old capital, and were lodged in different palaces, belonging to the great families there. On the day of the Coronation the state entrance to the Kremlin was a marvellous sight. Tremendous crowds lined the streets and every class of person was represented. Side by side with well-dressed ladies were peasants in Sunday clothes, and the enthusiasm of all was indescribable, all crossing themselves in emotion as the

procession passed. The Emperor rode alone at the head of the procession, surrounded by all the Grand Dukes and foreign Princes. The Empresses followed in the beautiful gilt state coaches, real eighteenth-century works of art, the panels painted by Boucher. The Dowager-Empress went first; and as she had already been crowned, her coach was surmounted by a crown. The Empress Alexandra Feodorovna drove alone, and had no crown on her coach. The long progress through the city lasted for several hours. When it reached the "Iverskaia" gates, all dismounted, the Empresses leaving their coaches to enter the chapel of Our Lady, which contained the celebrated "Iverskaia," a greatly venerated ikon, before which everyone passing bared his head. The procession entered the Kremlin through the "Nikolsky" gates, and then vanished from the sight of the people, who stood gazing spellbound after it, as if hoping that the brilliant vision would appear again.

The next day, heralds in mediaeval dress read out the proclamation announcing to "the good people of Our first capital" that the coronation was fixed for the 26th of May and was to be held in the old Cathedral of the Assumption, "Ouspensky Sobor." This was a fitting setting for so impressive a ceremony. Though the Cathedral had suffered much at the time of the French invasion in 1812, when Napoleon's troops had stabled their horses there, its ancient splendour had long since been restored. All its walls and pillars were covered with fifteenth-century frescoes, depicting the Saints and scenes from the Old and New Testaments. This brilliant background enhanced the beauty of the uniforms and robes. The jewels worn were wonderful, the Grand Duchess Serge's famous emeralds and the old Grand Duchess Constantine's sapphires, every flawless stone of which was about two inches across, attracted the attention of all. The "Ikonostase" (altar screen) glittered with gold and silver, and in it were enshrined some very old and venerated ikons. The ceremony

began early in the morning and lasted for several hours. The Emperor and Empress came on foot to the Cathedral in a state procession from the Kremlin. First came the Dowager-Empress alone, pale and serious-looking, with sad eyes, that reminded the onlookers that her own coronation had been not many years before. After her, each walking under a separate canopy, came Nicholas II and the Empress Alexandra Feodorovna, attended by numerous court officials in splendid uniforms. In contrast to the Dowager-Empress, who was blazing with diamonds and wearing an Imperial crown, the young Empress had no jewels except a string of pearls round her neck. She wore a Russian court dress of silver tissue, her hair in two long "love-locks," and no ornaments on her head where the Imperial crown was to rest. She looked lovely. At first she was a little flushed and nervous, but regained her self-possession as the ceremony proceeded. The Emperor wore the uniform of the Preobrajensky regiment, the oldest regiment in Russia. He had at first expressed the wish to wear the robes of the old Tsars and their old "Monomach" crown, as the newer "Imperial" crown was very heavy (9 lb.) and he had suffered from acute headaches ever since he had been wounded in the head by a Japanese fanatic at Otsou. Iron etiquette proclaimed the change impossible, and the Emperor was condemned to suffer considerable pain from the heavy crown.

The whole long five-hours' ceremony was a time of intense emotion to the Empress Alexandra. She was not tired at all, she told her sisters, everything was so beautiful. It seemed to her to be a kind of mystic marriage to Russia. She became one with Russia, sealed for ever a Russian in heart and soul, and so she remained from that day and all her life. The long Mass, the robing of the Emperor, his investiture with the Imperial insignia, she saw as in a dream. It is easy to imagine how ardent were her prayers as she knelt with every other person, while the Metropolitan read

the prayer for the Emperor, and how her heart went out to his when he knelt, this time all alone, the others standing, and prayed for Russia and his people. Then Their Majesties alone received the Holy Communion, and the Metropolitan anointed the Emperor with the holy oils. On this one day, the only time in his life, the Russian Emperor enters the sanctuary and receives the Blessed Sacrament like a priest. When Nicholas II went up the altar steps the chain of the order of St. Andrew fell to the ground—a bad omen to superstitious eyes. But the Empress was not troubled by this. She only saw the sunbeam that fell at that moment on his head, and felt it to be a kind of halo. The Emperor crowned himself, the Metropolitan handing him the crown. Then the Empress left her place and knelt before him. The Emperor took off his crown and touched her forehead with it. Then he took a smaller crown and with the utmost gentleness put it on her head. Her ladies fixed it on. The Emperor kissed her, took her hand as she rose, and both went to their places on their thrones. The church ceremony ended with the Empress Marie and all the Princes present doing homage to their crowned and anointed ruler. When his mother approached, pale with emotion, the Emperor's embrace seemed to everyone to be, not that of sovereign to subject, but of a dutiful son to his mother.

The whole procession left the Cathedral on foot and returned to the Kremlin. This time the Emperor and Empress Alexandra Feodorovna headed it in full regalia. Bells rang in all the "40 times 40" Moscow churches, cannon thundered, and the countless multitudes in the streets shouted themselves hoarse. The Imperial couple turned at the top of the celebrated "red staircase," and bowed low to the crowd three times. This symbolised their greeting to the country. In the palace they passed the representatives of their Mahommedan subjects, whose religion did not allow them to enter a Christian church.

These were, certainly, the most picturesque of all the guests; the splendour of their dress alone would take pages to describe. In a room by themselves stood a group of people in ordinary clothes. The foreign Princes inquired who these were, and were told that they were all descendants of people who had saved the lives of Russian sovereigns at different times. There were descendants of Ivan Soussanine, who had, by sacrificing his own life, saved the first Romanoff from the hands of the Poles, others who had saved Alexander II from assassination. Their presence spoke of the constancy of Imperial gratitude, but was a suggestive reminder.

The coronation banquet took place on the same day. Its scene was the old "Granovitaia Palata," the Council chamber of former Tsars. The walls were painted in frescoes, like those of the Cathedral of the Assumption. A special table was set for the Emperor and Empress, under a baldachin. There they dined alone, wearing their robes and crowns. High court officials waited upon them. The head carver handed the dishes, the "grand échanson" the goblet. The foreign ambassadors came in, and with each the Emperor drank a separate health. The foreign Princes watched the scene from the windows of the upper gallery (Tainik), from which the old Tsaritsas used to look down unseen at banquets and receptions, for only Russians took part in the banquet in the hall.

In the evening illuminations made Moscow like a town in a fairy tale. The young Empress started the illuminations from the Kremlin by pressing a button hidden in a bouquet of roses. She "looked blooming and radiant," wrote her sister Princess Louis to Queen Victoria, in a long account of the proceedings. The Empress's brother and sisters were present, the Grand Duchess Serge looking especially magnificent in a Court dress of cream velvet embroidered with gold fuchsias; the Duke of Connaught came with the Duchess to represent the Queen of England. An attrac-

tion for all eyes were the beautiful Crown Princess of Roumania and her sister, the Grand Duchess Victoria Melita of Hesse, in dresses of cloth of gold, the one embroidered with autumn leaves, the other with violet irises. The immense bearded Emir of Bokhara in Oriental robes, wearing a Russian General's epaulettes in diamonds on his Oriental *khalat*, shared the admiration of the crowds in the streets with the Emperor of China's envoy, the celebrated Li-Hung-Chang, an unforgettable picture in his yellow mandarin's robes and peacock feather.

The Empress, as a recent bride, took particular interest in an engagement that came about at the Coronation. The Prince of Naples (the present King of Italy), who represented Italy at the festivities, met the Princess Helena of Montenegro and became privately engaged to her at the house of the Grand Duchess Serge.

No incidents marred any of the first day's proceedings. It had been planned that great *fêtes* were to follow the religious ceremony, but only one ball at the Kremlin and one gala performance at the opera had been given before a terrible accident happened that cast a deep shadow over everything. By many it was considered ominous, and was compared to the disaster which marred the wedding ceremonies of King Louis XVI of France. A popular *fête* had been arranged at the " Hodynskoe Pole " outside the town, and in the course of it small gifts and souvenirs were to be distributed to the people. Peasants from all parts of the Empire had come to Moscow for this. The authorities had counted upon the same numbers as had attended the last coronation, but in reality the numbers were vastly greater. Owing to mismanagement by the local authorities, who had not taken the necessary measures to prevent a crush, the *fête* ended in disaster. It was a crowd " as large as that of three Derby days," writes Sir Francis Grenfell in his letters. The crowd tried to get to the booths where the presents were to be given, early in the morning, before the

police had arrived or anyone was present to keep order, and a panic ensued. The whole surging mass of people collided. Thousands were killed and injured hours before the time when the *fête* was supposed to begin. The extent of the disaster only gradually became evident. At first no one could tell even approximately how many people had suffered. The whole truth was indeed not told to the Emperor at all. He was informed that an accident had happened, but not its full extent. There were still thousands of people who had travelled immense distances to see their Sovereign, perhaps for the only time in their lives. The Ministers thought that the countermanding of the entertainment would cause disappointment to the people who had not seen the accident; and in consequence the Emperor and all his guests attended the *fête* at the appointed time in the afternoon. The Emperor's horror knew no bounds when he heard later of the terrible disaster that had preceded it. Both he and the Empress wanted to cancel the French Ambassador's ball, arranged for that very night. They were told this was impossible, the French Government having made the most extravagant preparations for the ball. Beautiful tapestries and plate had been sent expressly and at great expense from the *Garde-meuble National* in Paris. The Emperor had to give in and go. The Empress had to control her tears, but it was with a face of utter misery that she attended the Marquis de Montebello's wonderful entertainment. She behaved like an automaton, and all her thoughts were with the dead and dying. When the Imperial couple visited the hospitals where the victims lay, the scenes which they saw rent the Empress's heart. She would have given up all festivities on the spot and have nursed the people with her own hands, but official duties had to be fulfilled. Private feelings were held of no account. The Emperor had large sums distributed to the relatives of the victims, but the sovereigns themselves had to go on with their parts, whatever it might cost them.

The Empress never forgot her feelings at a State luncheon given just after their return from a hospital, at which she had surreptitiously to wipe her eyes with her napkin, as she remembered the terrible things she had seen.

This tragic incident cast a gloom over all the remaining functions. Everything was gone through according to programme. There were balls, reviews, receptions, too many to enumerate, till June 7th, when the foreign Princes left, and the Emperor and Empress went for a private visit to the Grand Duke Serge. The Empress was still nursing her baby, and fatigue and emotion were beginning to tell upon her. There was a large party at Illinskoe. The Empress's sisters and her brother and his wife were there, with members of their suites, and many of the usual friends of the Grand Ducal couple. The atmosphere was simple and sociable, and the Empress enjoyed her stay. The Grand Duke Serge provided theatricals and concerts for their entertainment. The Empress and her sisters revisited the neighbours she had got to know in 1889. Among these Prince and Princess Youssoupoff gave a wonderful theatrical performance in Their Majesties' honour, in their own private theatre at Arkhangelskoe, to which came a number of guests from Moscow. All the best singers and dancers took part in this performance and the scene was a marvellous sight, the guests occupying the boxes, while the whole pit had been turned into one huge bed of wonderful roses. It was an entertainment on the grand old Russian scale, and a worthy sequel to the coronation *fêtes*.

Though the "Hodynka" disaster had dimmed its radiance, the Coronation itself always remained a great and sacred memory to the Empress.

CHAPTER VIII

JOURNEYS IN RUSSIA AND ABROAD, 1896

THAT summer the Emperor and the Empress undertook their first real journey through Russia, and went to the opening of a great International Exhibition at Nijni-Novgorod. The three days spent there were at the time of the annual fair, centre of all the commerce of Russia and the East, and in this also they were much interested. The Emperor was young then, and still believed that he would have time to see everything thoroughly and personally. At Nijni the Imperial couple received deputations from peasant elders from the whole country. The Empress ever afterwards cherished a dream that some day they would be able to go down the Volga, visiting all the towns on the great river's banks. This they were only able to do partially in 1913.

After a short stay at Tsarskoe Selo, the Emperor and Empress started on the series of State visits to foreign Courts that are customary on accession to a throne. The first visit was to Vienna, where they stayed with the Emperor Franz Josef, arriving on August 27th, 1896.

On all subsequent journeys the baby accompanied her parents, as the Empress wanted to show her "precious treasure" to her great-grandmother, Queen Victoria, in England.

The Empress Elisabeth of Austria, who had quite retired from Court after the tragic death of her son, the Crown Prince Rudolph, came especially to Vienna to welcome the young Empress and was exceedingly kind to

her. This was the only time they ever met. Both the Emperor and the Empress fell immediately under the spell of the Empress Elisabeth's romantic personality, and never forgot the picture of loveliness she made at the State dinner at the Hofburg—which took place, by the way, at five P.M., as the Emperor Franz Josef had remained faithful to the hour of his young days. The Empress Elisabeth had retained her great beauty. She was all in black, and her glorious thick hair had still kept its deep brown colour. She became very animated when talking to the Emperor and was charming. There was the usual succession of reviews and gala performances. The Emperor Nicholas shot with the Austrian Emperor at Lainz, while the Empress visited museums.

The Imperial couple returned home through Kieff, and on their way had a great shock in the sudden death of the minister for Foreign Affairs, Prince Lobanov-Rostovsky, who was travelling with them, and who died from heart failure, after a walk at one of the halting-places on the journey. Prince Lobanov was an eminent statesman, and his loss was a great one to the country, and robbed the young Emperor of one of his ablest ministers, a loss which he keenly felt.

At Kieff the Emperor and Empress visited different institutions and were much fêted, for this was their first visit to the town. They went, among other places, to the celebrated "Lavra," a monastery where thousands of relics of saints are enshrined in catacombs like those of Rome. They were also present at the consecration of the Cathedral of St. Vladimir where the Empress saw for the first time the work of the painter Vassnetzoff. The adaptation of Byzantine art to modern taste—his particular style—greatly pleased her and she was ever afterwards an admirer of the celebrated artist's work.

After manœuvres in the neighbourhood of Kieff, the journeys abroad were resumed. At the Emperor William's

invitation the Imperial travellers went to the German manœuvres. They were met at Breslau by the German Emperor and Empress and were joined there by Prince and Princess Henry of Prussia. The Empress was delighted that the official visit to Berlin was thus avoided, for she hated all formal receptions, and the stay at Breslau was very short, though it included the inevitable reviews and banquets, with the usual exchange of speeches and a gala performance at the local opera. Copenhagen was the next on the list, a day being spent on the way with Princess Henry at Kiel. Ten days were spent in Denmark with the Emperor's grandparents, the King and Queen, where a large family party had been gathered together to meet the Emperor and Empress.

Their new yacht the *Standart*, then making her maiden trip, took the Emperor and Empress from Copenhagen to St. Abb's Head where they were met (on September 22nd) by the Prince of Wales and the Duke of Connaught on behalf of the Queen. From Aberdeen, where a naval review was held in their honour, Their Majesties went to Balmoral. Lord Pembroke was in attendance. They were escorted from Ballater to Balmoral by a squadron of the Scots Greys, of which the Emperor was colonel, and by Highlanders bearing torches.

The Empress was impatiently awaiting the moment of seeing Queen Victoria again. Their meeting was very warm and affectionate, and the party was a purely family one, though the necessary official stamp was lent to it by the presence of the Baron de Stael, the popular Russian Ambassador, and of Cabinet Ministers in attendance, Lord Salisbury, the Duke of Devonshire, Lord Lansdowne, Mr. Arthur Balfour, and others. A large party of relations had gathered here also to meet the Russian Sovereigns. The Prince and Princess of Wales had come, the Duke and Duchess of Connaught, the aged Duke of Cambridge, Princess Louise, Marchioness of Lorne, Princess Beatrice, and the Empress's special friend, the Princess Helena

Victoria. After the first solemn banquet, the ten days' visit was quite informal. The Empress went about as in old days with her cousins. Queen Victoria was happy at seeing her grown into so fine and blooming a woman, for she had been thin and drooping at her last visit, and suffering from acute sciatica. The Queen had always approved of her granddaughter's match and personally liked the Emperor more and more. This liking did not, however, influence her political attitude towards Russia. It was her point of view, which was echoed by the Empress Alexandra, when she wrote to her sister, the Princess Louis of Battenberg, that "family ties don't count in politics" (March 3rd, 1897).

The Empress's feelings at leaving Balmoral may be seen in a letter to Miss Jackson:

BALMORAL CASTLE,
October 3rd, 96.

DEAREST MADGIE,—Just before leaving, I hasten to send you a few words of loving thanks for your dear letter. Not knowing your Eastbourne address, I send this epistle to London. Tho' I did not write to you for the 20th, my thoughts and best wishes were with you. I hope *my* Harrogate and the beautiful Yorkshire air did you good! Here we have not had the finest weather. My husband has not shot one stag, only a brace of grouse.

It has been such a very short stay and I leave dear kind Grandmama with a heavy heart. Who knows when we may meet again and where? Now I have made the acquaintance of Lord Pembroke about whom and whose sisters you used to tell me. He is charming and very good-looking. I have good news from Irene but, alas, we shall not see her.

We had a good passage from Denmark. Next Saturday morning, God grant, we shall be at dear Darmstadt. Goodbye, Darling, and God bless you.

Yr. old P.Q. No. III,
ALIX.

The Emperor and Empress embarked at Portsmouth for France. To this visit great importance was attached by politicians both in Russia and in France. No Russian

Emperor had been to France since the Franco-Russian *entente*, and Nicholas II's visit was looked on as proclaiming to the world his continuation of his father's policy. In consequence, the French Government did all in its power to give its Imperial guests a splendid reception. Apart from the political motives that dictated the visit, the Empress was keenly looking forward to seeing Paris, where she had never been. She may even have had ideas of going about privately to see the scenes of the Empress Eugénie's splendour, of which she had heard so much from the Empress herself. The Russian Sovereigns, from the moment they set foot on French soil, were the objects of an unceasing ovation. When they reached Paris, this became positively delirious. The enthusiastic Paris public cheered them on every occasion. Even the baby Grand Duchess—now ten months old—arriving quietly at another station and driving in her nurse's arms had her own private reception amid cries of "*Vive le bébé et la nounou!*"

The Press was full of nothing but France's guests. Every detail of their mode of life was noted. Reams of poetry were written. The town was wonderfully decorated. In order to show Paris under its finest aspect—Nature not being obliging—all the chestnut trees had been covered with artificial blooms, which, if unseasonable, were still effective. Popular opinion at the time, as reported in the papers, considered that *la dame du Tsar est bien belle*. The programme of official functions and sight-seeing was much greater than the allotted time could contain. To the Empress's secret disappointment, there could be no private excursions. They could only hurry round the places of interest she had so much longed to visit. They rushed through the Louvre; she could not see a single gallery or museum; and as for shopping, which as a true woman she would certainly not have disdained, there could be no question of it at all.

The newspapers reported that in an *exquise toilette de satin bleu* she was present with President Faure and the Emperor at the laying of the foundation stone of the Pont Alexandre III; that she accompanied the Emperor to Notre Dame, where they were met in ceremony by the clergy, the organ playing the Russian anthem; that they visited the Pantheon and also the Invalides, where they stood before the tomb of Moscow's invader, the great Napoleon. They went to the Mint, and Sèvres was visited on their way to Versailles, and at the china factory they were given as an appropriate present a bust of the Empress Catherine the Great. To the Empress, the most interesting day was the one at Versailles, where she was thrilled by the palace, its artistic beauties and historical associations. The rooms placed at her disposal were those of Queen Marie-Antoinette—to the suppressed horror of her suite who, superstitiously, found the associations ominous. A marvellous theatrical performance in the Salon d'Hercule was arranged after the State dinner. During the performance the great Sarah Bernhardt recited verses by Sully Prudhomme—a favourite poet of the Empress's. Here the "Divine Sarah" in the guise of a wood nymph of Versailles welcomed the Imperial couple, addressing a few special sentences to the Empress. Coquelin followed in the *Sous-préfet aux Champs*, Réjane in another small piece. The best singers of the day appeared in the *Seasons* of Haydn, a small ballet closing a really wonderful performance. The last event of their stay was a review at Châlons on October 9th.

They travelled from Versailles in the private train of Napoleon III, used for the first time since the fall of the Empire. It had been the acme of comfort and luxury when it was used by the Emperor of the French, but in 1896 it seemed strangely out of date in its old-fashioned elegance, and small in comparison with modern Pullman cars.

Their stay in France and the warmth of the welcome they received remained an unforgettable memory to both the Emperor and Empress, and often in later years did the Empress delight the small Grand Duchesses with stories of Paris and Versailles. From France, the Emperor and Empress went to Darmstadt. This was a short visit, but a great pleasure to the Empress, who longed to be with her brother again after the first long separation in their lives. She had left, not knowing what the future had in store for her, and she returned as Empress of Russia. She went about very little, as she wanted to spend all the time possible with her family, but Hesse gave its Princess a splendid welcome.

CHAPTER IX

FIRST CHARITIES, AND LIFE FROM 1896 TO 1901

ON the advice of the Grand Duchess Serge, the Empress had planned a little informal entertaining for the following winter which would help her to know more of St. Petersburg society. Nothing could come of this plan, however, as another baby was expected, and the Empress was far from well. She had to lie up for months, and spent seven weeks actually in bed. When she was up she was again a martyr to sciatica, and had to be wheeled about in a chair. (The Emperor's diaries make frequent mention of it.) The Empress was always very unwell before her confinements. The general public did not know this. It was contrary to Russian Court etiquette even to mention the health of the sovereign or his wife, and the Empress herself was always shy of letting anyone know of her condition, and hid it as long as she could. All her children, except her eldest daughter, were born in the spring or early summer, so that she was generally incapacitated in the winter at the time of the St. Petersburg "season," without its being known that it was her health alone that kept her so much in retirement. Further, she insisted on nursing her babies, which was an additional tie. This she considered a mother's sacred duty, though it probably exhausted her physically far more than she realised, as she tried at the same time to carry out her official duties. The Empress certainly had bad luck where her health was concerned. In the years when she was neither expecting nor nursing a baby, she invariably

fell ill. One winter she had influenza three times; another year she had measles; then the children were ill. There seemed to be always something that at the last moment prevented the Empress from giving the smaller receptions through which she would have known society better and have become better known herself. She could, herself, have done very well without *fêtes* and amusements. These "meant nothing to her," as she wrote to Princess Louis. Her home life was ideally happy. She grudged every moment away from the Emperor and her children. But the Emperor was a very busy man. She could never be long alone with him. Every party he attended, every hour he spent with her, was paid for by long and late hours among his papers. As time went on, her increasing family took up more and more of her attention,[1] and she gave up the struggle to contrive to make time in which to see people outside her immediate and easily accessible *entourage*.

During the long weeks of enforced quiet before her second daughter's birth (the Grand Duchess Tatiana, June 10th, 1897), the Empress thought out many of her future charities. From her very first letters from Russia, written just after her marriage, in which she lamented the fact that she had not yet seen any hospitals, she was intent on the idea of philanthropic activity. When she came to Russia, all the existing charitable institutions, the Red Cross and the girls' schools were under the patronage of the Dowager-Empress. She was also the head of the vast organisation, called, after its founder, the Emperor Paul's wife, "the Establishment of the Empress Marie." It was suggested that the young Empress should identify herself with some new foundation, which should bear her name. Her choice fell upon workhouses for the poor,

[1] Between 1895 and 1904 five children were born to the Imperial couple, and in September 1902 a bulletin was issued, stating that the hopes which the Empress had entertained were disappointed. She was very ill at the time.

The Alexander Palace at Tsarskoe Selo—Garden front.
In this wing the Imperial family lived.

(From an old lithograph.)

to be set up all over the country, and to be managed by a committee called the "Help by work" [1] committee.

The Empress took a great interest in the development of this work. She was a really enthusiastic philanthropist. She loved to think out fresh schemes and put them in action. She was practical and gave minute attention to every detail; she had wide conceptions, and brought a personal element into everything. She always plunged straight into the subject under discussion, the most practical suggestions and those that enlarged and improved on the original project generally coming from her. All those who came in touch with this side of her character speak with the same admiration of her clear head and her sound common-sense. She lost all self-consciousness when she was speaking of the subjects that interested her, and at once put her fellow-workers on an easy footing. In particular, everything to do with infant welfare was of interest to her. There was much to be done in that special line in Russia, and the Empress was very anxious to take this up actively.

Another favourite scheme was a school for nurses and housemaids. She speaks of having written to England for "rules to try and go by a little," and modelled her school on Princess Christian's School for Nurses in London. This was also carried through by her, and the school was opened at Tsarskoe Selo in 1905, after considerable difficulty. She visited it regularly, planning improvements and enlargements till the last. Speaking of these projects, the Empress wrote to Princess Louis (June 17th, 1902) that "All new things are difficult, but awfully interesting when one takes them into one's hands—the only way to make things progress quickly." In all her charity work the Empress had to fight not only against inertia, but often against

[1] It was at the Empress's suggestion that the "Committee of Help by Work" started crèches in the villages in summer. She took up the idea of an orthopaedic institute for children. She wrote full details to Princess Louis on June 17th, 1902, saying, "None exists in Russia. The question interests me greatly." She had the satisfaction of seeing this establishment built and in excellent order.

great opposition to the introduction of new ideas. The difficulty of providing funds for her schemes was generally used as an argument against them, for there was not in Russia that ready response from private charity which is usual in England, and nearly all the charities had to be supported by the Government. When she managed to surmount this obstacle, she had always to take precautions that her ideas should not be " shelved," but really carried out. She had often a hard fight to carry out her plans, and although she succeeded in doing much, there were a great many projects which she was never able to put into execution.

The Empress often had to draw heavily on her own purse for her charities. Strange as it may seem, the Empress's private fortune was not very large, and she had to curtail her private expenses to meet those of her charities. She was very generous in her donations. It is not generally known that the Empress provided for the upkeep of her school for nurses out of her own pocket. During the war an unheard-of thing occurred (October 1915). New petitioners were told in her secretary's office that they would have to wait till January 1916 to get their remittances, as the Empress had spent all her yearly income in giving generously right and left to war charities, widows and orphans. During the famine year of 1898, for instance, she gave 50,000 roubles (about £5000) out of her privy purse to relieve distress in the famine districts.

She realised the need of professional schools for girls, and wanted to transform the so-called " Patriotic schools " into more modern establishments. This, however, proved beyond her power. Innumerable objections were raised, and the officials responsible for these schools could not see the need for any alteration. Alexandra Feodorovna only made enemies for herself among the great ladies who were the patronesses of the schools which she had pronounced to be out of date and unpractical. She took this idea up

again during the war (1915–16), but had not time to carry it out.

During the spring of 1897 Princess Henry of Prussia took the opportunity to come and stay with her sister, leaving some little time before the Grand Duchess Tatiana was born. In the spring and summer of this year, all the sovereigns to whom State visits had been paid came in their turn to Russia. The Emperor Franz Josef was the first, accompanied by the Archduke Otto, but the Empress's health precluded any public appearances on her part. This visit was followed later in the summer by one from the German Emperor and Empress, and in the autumn came the French President, Felix Faure, accompanied by Admiral Gervais, General de Boisdeffre, and M. Gabriel Hanotaux. All these receptions were arranged on much the same lines. The magnificent palace at Peterhof (the Imperial Family did not reside in it themselves), with the park that surrounded it, gave the festivities a more effective setting than did the stiff Winter Palace in St. Petersburg. The command performances given in their honour were always greatly appreciated by the foreign guests. The Ballet and the Opera singers from the Imperial theatre generally appeared in one of the small court theatres at Peterhof, or at the camp at Krasnoe. A particularly good ballet was given, on a beautiful summer evening, on one of the islands on the lake in the Peterhof Park, on the occasion of the visit of the German Emperor.

When the Court was at Peterhof the Empress often went with the Emperor to the camp at Krasnoe Selo, and during manœuvres they sometimes stayed there for several days, living in small wooden houses of the *datcha* type. She was a true soldier's daughter, and enjoyed these expeditions, military pageants, and reviews, and camp life with bands playing, bugles sounding, and regiments marching. The Emperor, too, was happy in reviving the old associations of his soldier days. The Empress was

appointed honorary colonel of the Guard Lancers and was very proud of her regiment, taking great interest in all the officers and men. In May 1903, the Jubilee of the regiment, she was present at the review in Lancer's uniform and rode at the regiment's head.

Every autumn during these first years (up to 1905) the Imperial Family went to the Emperor's Polish shooting lodges, Skierniewice, Spala and Belovege. Sometimes the Empress walked with the Emperor for hours while he shot, for she always entered into all her husband's interests, although she never handled a gun herself, as she shared Queen Victoria's opinion that this was "a mannish pastime." When she was not walking with the Emperor she would ride, or drive her four-in-hand through the vast forests in which the lodges stood. These country sojourns away from towns, noise, bustle and State entertaining were a delight to her.

The Emperor was a great walker, and whenever they were together in the country his wife accompanied him on his longest walks. He went at a terrific pace, and even his gentlemen had the greatest difficulty in keeping up with him, but the Empress would never admit fatigue. The long walks she took with the Emperor in early days almost certainly laid the foundations of the heart trouble from which she suffered so badly in later years. The Emperor never realised how tired she must have been, for she was always "game to the end."

She describes one of these shooting visits to her sister, Princess Louis, in 1897: "Generally out for ten hours—bisons, roebucks, stags, elks, wild bear, capercailzies." These were their "holidays." There were no ministers in attendance except Baron Freedericsz. Only his papers followed the Emperor always.

After one of these visits (1897) the Emperor and Empress went to Warsaw to see the capital of their kingdom of Poland. They spent three days at the Lazenki Palace,

and were very well received by the Poles, the nobility giving the Emperor a million roubles (£100,000) for charities. All the Polish ladies came to the Empress's reception at the Palace, and the young men of the aristocracy, on their own initiative, kept order in the streets during the Imperial visit.

In 1897 and 1899 the shooting in Poland was followed by visits to Darmstadt. On the first visit, the Imperial couple laid the foundation stone of the Russian church that was built in Darmstadt in memory of the Empress Marie Alexandrovna, the Emperor Nicholas's grandmother, who, it will be remembered, had also been a Hessian Princess. The Emperor entrusted the paintings and mosaics for this church to Vassnetzoff, the artist whose paintings had so charmed the Empress at Kieff, and it was consecrated in 1899. It is the only specimen outside Russia of this great Russian painter's work. Who knows what has been the fate of the churches in Russia that were decorated by him?

During this journey abroad both the Emperor and the Empress came into contact with wider ideas, and heard freer and more varied opinions on political and general questions than they could do in Russia, in the limited circle from which all sovereigns find it so difficult to escape.

At Darmstadt the Imperial couple went about a great deal with their hosts. They met all kinds of people, for the Grand Duke of Hesse, a liberal and intellectual man, liked to hear and discuss every kind of general question, and they always returned with a store of new ideas. In later years these trips abroad became rarer. The Emperor was more and more tied down. The Empress never even contemplated the possibility of going anywhere without him. One day of separation meant a wrench to her, and for the first ten years of their married life the Imperial couple never parted. In 1899, on June 26th, a third daughter was born,

the Grand Duchess Marie Nicolaevna. For the last months before her birth the Empress was again very unwell. Indeed, brave though she always was, she wrote to her eldest sister: "I never like making plans. . . . God knows how it will all end" (April 4th, 1899). There was great anxiety for her when the baby was born, but both were saved, and the little Grand Duchess was strong and healthy, as were all her sisters.

A fortnight after the birth of the Grand Duchess Marie, the Cesarevitch George, the Emperor's brother and heir-apparent, died in his villa in the Caucasus (July 11th, 1899). He had long suffered from lung trouble and had not lived in St. Petersburg for years. The Emperor's second brother, the Grand Duke Michael Alexandrovitch, was proclaimed heir to the throne.

The last years of the century passed without bringing any great outward change into the Empress's life. Her private life was always growing fuller, her happiness greater. The winter of 1897/8 was a brilliant one. The Empress's cousin, Princess Helena Victoria, the daughter of Princess Christian, came on a visit, and on her account the Empress went about far more than ever before to balls and dinners at the foreign Embassies and private houses in St. Petersburg. Her young cousin's presence seemed to give her support, and the more she got into the spirit of society life, the more she enjoyed it. The ill-luck that seemed to follow her met her again now, for just as she seemed to be getting into touch with society she developed measles, caught in one of the St. Petersburg schools, which she visited "twice daily" with the Emperor, to give the growing generation a chance of seeing their sovereigns.

In 1900 the Imperial couple revived the ancient custom of spending Easter in Moscow, in order to get to know the old capital and its people. At the beginning of Holy Week the whole Court migrated to Moscow. Easter is the greatest Church festival in Russia. All the most impres-

sive ceremonies of the Orthodox Church are centred round that season. The old-world atmosphere of the Kremlin, and of the beautiful churches, both within the palace itself and inside the Kremlin walls, added to the splendour of every ceremony. The Emperor and Empress were present at the elaborate rites of brewing the Holy Chrism at the Metropolitan's palace, which took place every two years, with much ancient and symbolic ceremonial. Night and day for several days the oils were stirred by a succession of priests, while others read the Holy Scriptures aloud to them. The beautiful silver cauldrons, the vast apartments lit at night by innumerable wax candles, and scented by the boiling spices, made a picture that seemed to belong to the earliest Byzantine times.

The Empress loved to explore every church and every cranny of the Kremlin. Her brother-in-law, the Grand Duke Serge, was her guide. He knew all the history and all the art treasures of the ancient city. The Empress always fell under the spell of old Russia in Moscow. Though in other countries she could be modern and a believer in new conditions, here the gorgeous treasures, the religious ceremonies reawakened her admiration for the old. Moscow at Easter seemed to her to breathe the real spirit of Russia. Involuntarily she fashioned her mind to suit it. She used to say that she felt like an ancient Tsaritsa, sitting in her rooms in the Kremlin with her sister and their ladies, embroidering velvet hangings for their church. This particular work took more time than had been anticipated, and finally the Empress had to call in some nuns from a neighbouring convent to help her. One morning, when she came into the room where they were working, the Empress felt her heart stand still an instant in fear, for all the nuns together fell prone on the ground at her feet! A terrible picture arose in her mind of their having worked so hard through the whole night that they were suddenly overcome by fatigue. To her relief, they rose as suddenly

as they had fallen, their pink countenances perfectly unruffled. They had *not* worked through the night, and indeed had only just come. They were simply greeting the Empress in the way that convent rules directed that they should greet their Abbess—prostrating themselves before her!

During the week before Easter the Empress went with the Emperor to the traditional ceremonies. They assisted at midnight Mass at the church in the Kremlin, curiously called "Of the Saviour behind the Golden Gate," and on the night of Good Friday they unexpectedly mingled with the crowd at the night "Procession of the Winding-Sheet" at the Cathedral of the Assumption. Here Russia's Emperor and Empress stood beside their humblest subjects, holding lighted tapers in their hands. The Good Friday night procession in the Kremlin is an unforgettable scene. Only those who have seen it can realise the poetry of the huge and reverent crowds, the lighted tapers, the procession wending its slow way to the cathedral, looming majestic and mysterious in the darkness. The whole scene, the whole atmosphere entranced the Empress. Here she felt that she was one with Holy Russia, one with the Russian people in their simple and fervent faith.

Altogether Moscow seemed delightful to her. The Emperor and Empress went to all the schools, to the *Assemblée de la noblesse*, and carried out an extensive official programme. The Grand Duke and Grand Duchess Serge were with them. Supported by them, the Empress felt at her ease; she found Moscow charming, and Moscow people were delighted with her.

That autumn the Imperial Family went to Livadia, in the Crimea, for the first time since the Emperor's accession. Now everything was steeped in sunshine for the Empress Alexandra. She was a happy wife, the mother of three fine children, and the Crimea appeared to her indeed an earthly paradise. The big palace was too full of the sad memories

of 1894, but the little old palace in which they lived proved very damp and unhealthy, delightful as it was outside. At first they were perfectly happy and enjoyed their stay, but soon the Emperor fell ill with what proved to be a rather serious form of typhoid. The Empress had a great horror of the illness that had carried off her grandfather, the Prince Consort, and had so nearly been fatal to King Edward VII. But a crisis always found her self-possessed and resourceful. She nursed the Emperor herself, even doing the night nursing, and acted as his private secretary when he was able to attend to papers, transmitting his decisions to his Ministers. Her link with the outer world was her former lady-in-waiting—now her friend—Princess Marie Bariatinsky, who was on a visit and with whom she shared her anxieties.[1] The Empress wrote to her sister, Princess Louis, at the time :

Nicky was really an angel of patience during his wearisome illness, never complaining, always ready to do all one bid him. His old valet and I nursed him. The shock of his illness and feeling myself necessary gave me new strength, as I had been very wretched before. I rebelled at a nurse being taken and we managed perfectly ourselves. Orchie would wash his face and hands in the morning, and bring my meals in always. I took them on the sofa still for some time. Now I suffer from head and heartache, the latter from nerves and many sleepless nights. When he was getting better I read to him, almost all day long.

In remembrance of these anxious days Princess Bariatinsky and her two colleagues presented the Empress with

[1] During the Emperor's illness a question was raised on which Count Sergei Julievitch Witte, who showed himself in his memoirs so hostile to the Empress, took a characteristic standpoint. The Ministers assembled in council to discuss measures to be taken in case of the death of the Emperor. The Minister of the Court, Baron Freedericsz, expressed the opinion that a regency ought to be appointed in case of the Emperor's death, thus allowing for the possibility of the Empress's being pregnant. (The Grand Duchess Anastasia was born six months later.) Count Witte energetically opposed this, though Freedericsz pointed out that it might be depriving an unborn heir of his rights. Witte insisted on the Grand Duke Michael, the Emperor's brother, being proclaimed Emperor. He was very fond of the Grand Duke, who had been his pupil. Witte's contention was that his proposal was in accordance with the existing laws of succession, and he carried his point. Several years later this law was amended.

a small ikon. In the evening the Empress wrote to her as follows:

LIVADIA,
Dec. 31st, 1900.

DEAREST MARY,—I feel I cannot go to bed without having once more thanked you from the bottom of my heart for the Image. It touched me *deeply*, and tears were not far off when you three gave it me. Bless you for your kind thought. I shall always take it with me everywhere as a remembrance of that anxious time and Xmastide and the beginning of the new century. What sorrows this last year brought us, what endless anxieties, what worries and losses—God grant the new year may be a calmer and happier one for the whole of dear Russia. Sleep well and peacefully. . . .

The Emperor's strong and wiry constitution triumphed—he was scarcely ever ill in his life. Still the Court could not return to St. Petersburg until January, when they expected a visit from the Grand Duke and Grand Duchess of Hesse. They had been only a few days there when the news came for which her last letters from England had prepared the Empress—Queen Victoria died on January 22nd, 1901.

CHAPTER X

THE EMPRESS AND QUEEN VICTORIA—NEW FRIENDSHIPS

HER grandmother's death was a real sorrow to the Empress. Queen Victoria had been a special link with the mother she dimly remembered, as well as a very loving grandmother. The Queen had been particularly fond of her Hessian grandchildren, and Princess Alix was considered by the family to be her favourite. The Queen's feelings were probably influenced first of all by sympathy for the little motherless girl. But the Queen and the Empress had many points in common, which Queen Victoria herself was quick to recognise. The Empress Alexandra had the Queen's warm heart, her capacity for great enthusiasms, both for ideas and for people, the same intense sense of duty, the same fidelity in friendship.

Queen Victoria had always given tangible proofs of her interest in her grandchildren. She had kept in touch with their surroundings, and had come herself to take part in important incidents in their lives. When she went to Coburg for the wedding of her grandson, the Grand Duke of Hesse, the idea of the simultaneous engagement of Princess Alix may have been in her mind. In any case, the Queen was there, at that important moment, ready to give the Princess the sympathy and good counsel that she might have sought from her mother at such a time. The Queen, much as she liked the Emperor Nicholas, had many personal regrets that " her darling Alicky " lived too far away to be able to pay her yearly visits to England. " I have a right to her," the Queen used to say pathetically.

The Empress on her side, writing to the Princess Bariatinsky (July 16th, 1900) and speaking of the Queen, said:

. . . My grandmother invites us to come to England, but now is certainly not the moment to be out of the country. How intensely I long to see her dear old face, you can imagine; never have we been separated so long, 4 whole years, and I have the feeling as tho' I should never see her any more. Were it not so far away, I should have gone off all alone for a few days to see her and left the children and my husband, as she has been as a mother to me, ever since Mama's death 22 years ago.

To-morrow is the Christening. . . .

She, who never left her husband, even thought of going "all alone for a few days to see her," but some childish ailments finally prevented the Empress from putting her plan into execution.

When she heard of the Queen's death, the Empress wanted to start immediately for Windsor with her brother. She was dissuaded, however, as she was pregnant at the time (the fourth Grand Duchess, Anastasia, was born in the early summer). She quite broke down at the funeral service in the English church at St. Petersburg.

How I envy you [she wrote to her sister, the Princess Louis] being able to see beloved Grandmama being taken to her last rest. I cannot believe she is really gone, that we shall never see her any more. It seems impossible. Since one can remember, she was in our life, and a dearer kinder being never was. The whole world sorrows over her. England without the Queen seems impossible. How thankful, that she was spared all physical suffering. Morally, she had too much to bear this year (January 28th, 1901).

"She was in our life" explains the great void that the Queen's death meant for the Empress. There was now no older authority to whom she could turn for counsel. She was thrown on her own judgment and had to travel by her own light. Ever since her marriage, the Empress had corresponded regularly with her grandmother. Queen

Victoria had always feared that her great reserve and shyness would hamper the Empress and be misunderstood, and it is probable that in addition to her grandmotherly interest in the Empress's family life, the Queen sometimes gave this favourite grandchild the benefit of her wide experience. All the Queen's letters and the Empress's answers, which were returned to Her Majesty after Queen Victoria's death, were destroyed in March 1917 by the Empress, who did not want things so precious to her to fall into the Bolsheviks' hands.

Her mourning and her state of health obliged the Empress once more to lead a very secluded life that winter. But she had now found congenial friends in the Imperial Family in the Grand Duchess Peter (Militza Nicolaevna) and her sister Stana (Anastasia) Nicolaevna, then Duchess of Leuchtenberg. These were daughters of King Nicholas of Montenegro. Their sister, Princess Anna, had just married the Empress's cousin, Prince Francis Joseph of Battenberg, and had gone to live in Darmstadt. This was a link between them, and the anxieties caused by the Emperor's illness had drawn them all together. The Grand Duchess Militza was a clever woman, with wide intellectual interests. She had a real knowledge of the East and of Eastern things. She could speak Persian, was an authority on ancient Persian literature, and had read and translated books on the philosophy and religion of Persia, India and China. She had also made a study of theological questions connected with the Orthodox Church. The sisters were devoted to each other and had delightfully warm and attractive manners. The Empress soon became really intimate with them, while the Emperor found a friend in the Grand Duke Peter Nicolaevitch, an intellectual and artistic man, an architect of no mean ability, who had never taken any part in public affairs, and who, on account of his health, had lived away from the capital. That year, however, the "Montenegrin Grand

Duchesses," as they were called, came to St. Petersburg, and the Empress saw them nearly every day.

The Duchess of Leuchtenberg, after her divorce from the Duke George, married the Grand Duke Nicholas Nicolaevitch, the Grand Duke Peter's brother (in 1901). The Grand Duke Peter spent the summer quite close to Peterhof, so that the Empress could often see her friends. They read together, and talked over books and the abstract subjects that the Empress loved. The Grand Duchesses awakened in the Empress a real interest in theological questions. From the Lutheran creed of her girlhood, the Empress had now come to the most rigid adherence to the Orthodox Church. She held views that were considered unduly strict by many modern Russians, and zealously studied the intricate works of the old Fathers of the Church. Besides these she read many French and English philosophical books.

Her fourth daughter, the Grand Duchess Anastasia Nicolaevna, was born at Peterhof on June 18th, 1901. However well the Emperor might hide his feelings, the Empress knew how intensely he longed for a son. He never showed any visible regret when the sex of his successive babies was announced. When the Grand Duchess Marie was born, it was noticed that he set off on a long solitary walk, but that he came back as outwardly unruffled as ever. In the upper classes of the country, however, there was much disappointment at the births of so many daughters. It was felt that the Empress was failing to do her duty by the State. The country people, on the other hand, did not care much if it were a Grand Duke or a Grand Duchess who was born. Every Imperial baby meant that amnesties were granted, that jails were opened, that criminals saw their terms of imprisonment cut short. They heard the Grand Duke Michael prayed for in church, and did not trouble their heads much if the heir were the Emperor's brother or

his son. It was the Empress herself who longed most of all for a son. Under her new friends' influence, her whole heart went out in prayers that she might give an heir to Russia. Just at that time, a monk of the eighteenth century, named Seraphim, was canonised by order of the Russian Holy Synod, and the Emperor and Empress went to the ceremony in the monastery of Saroff (July 1903).

To the Empress this journey was in the light of a pilgrimage. Not only did the religious service impress and inspire her, but, during their whole journey and their stay at Saroff, she was in close contact with the simple country people whom she loved. The Empress was never shy with the peasants. She talked to them like children in her still indifferent Russian, and meeting her as they did without official pomp, the peasants loved her in return.

The Grand Duchess Serge also fell under the spell of Saroff, and she wrote to Princess Louis :

> So many beautiful, healthy impressions. We drove six hours before arriving at the convent and in the village the pretty bright red costumes and pretty healthy people looked so picturesque. The convent is lovely, situated in a splendid colossal pine wood. The ceremony and prayers were very fine. Seraphim was a monk, who lived in the 18th century a very pure and holy life, cured many physically and morally, and after death the miracles continue. Thousands and thousands from the whole of Russia came for that day [i.e. the canonisation] to pray and brought their sick from Siberia, from the Caucasus. . Oh, what misery, what illnesses we saw, and what faith ! It seemed as if we were living in Christ's time. . . . Oh how they prayed, how they cried, these poor mothers with their sick children, and thank God, how many were cured ! We had the blessing of seeing a little dumb girl speak, but how her mother prayed for her !

These scenes made an immense impression on the Empress. It is difficult for practical Protestant minds to grasp the intensity of religious fervour that seizes an

Orthodox or Catholic crowd. Only those people who have been on a pilgrimage to Lourdes or to Jerusalem can realise how when the Russian pilgrims come to the Holy Week services a crowd can be swayed with religious emotion.

It may be noted that in the beautiful church built at Tsarskoe Selo after the heir's birth the upper church was dedicated to the Holy Virgin "Feodoroffskaia"—a venerated Romanoff ikon, and the lower church to St. Seraphim of Saroff.

CHAPTER XI

FOREIGN TRIPS, AND LIFE FROM 1901 TO 1904

IN the friendship of the Grand Duchesses Militza and Stana (Anastasia) Nicolaevna, the Empress found the one thing that had been missing in her life since her friend Princess Bariatinsky had left for Rome—congenial society in the hours when the Emperor was busy. The Grand Duchesses did not help the Empress to enlarge her circle. They were not fond of society and their meetings were always *en famille*. The abstract interests into which they initiated her did not change her mode of life, nor did they appear to influence her outwardly. She was always cheerful at home, and full of interest in her family. She was now beginning to think of her children's education, giving her eldest daughter her early lessons herself, and her interest in charities increased.

During the years 1897–1905 the Emperor and Empress went abroad nearly every second year or received State visits in Russia. The King of Italy came to Peterhof in 1901; the visit was returned in 1911. President Loubet also came to Russia in 1901, the Russian Sovereigns returning the visit in the autumn of the same year. On their way to France, they stayed again with old King Christian at Copenhagen. On this occasion, too, the Emperor met the German Emperor at Danzig, and the Empress paid a flying visit to Princess Henry of Prussia at Kiel, where she left her three small daughters during the State visit to France. This French trip began most inauspiciously. The *Standart*, though she was

wonderfully steady, had never met such a storm as that encountered between Germany and the French coast. The Emperor, who was an excellent sailor, saw his suite disappear, one by one, on different pretexts. The Empress was invisible, and soon the groans of the ladies and their maids began to resound through the ship. Loud supplications were heard that the ship should stop. They could not realise that they were on the high seas, and that there was no land in sight! Dunkirk, when it was at last reached, was no haven of rest to the Empress, for she had to appear on deck to meet the French President, her ladies crawling up behind her like flies in autumn. It was some slight consolation to Her Majesty to discover that the French President also had no sea-legs, and had to stay on board the *Standart* during the naval review, the weather being too bad for him to reach a French man-of-war. An amusing picture in the *Illustration* of the time shows the French deputies, who had come to see the review, all huddled together on deck, and presenting the picture of abject misery often seen in a Channel crossing. This picture was accompanied by an extract from the telegram from the President of the Chamber to the Minister of Marine saying—was it with sarcasm? —*C'était un spectacle reconfortant de voir, etc.* . . . The unfriendly reception of the elements was forgotten at Compiègne, where the Imperial couple spent a day as guests of the French President. Paris was not visited by them this time, to the great disappointment of the public, but the Emperor had come, chiefly, to be present at the great French manœuvres, where he went with President Loubet from Compiègne, the Empress accompanying him.

At Compiègne (September 28th) the visit was planned on much the same lines as had been the memorable day at Versailles in 1896, but here was the Napoleonic setting. The Empress enjoyed her day, when she could roam about the park and visit it all. In the evening there were

also theatricals following upon the State banquet, but the programme was naturally less full than it had been at Versailles. The Empress was pleased to meet some people and friends she knew, among them the Marquis and Marquise de Montebello, the French Ambassador in Russia at the time of their Coronation. The Emperor stood sponsor on that occasion to the first grandson of the Marquis and Marquise, the late Nicholas de Montebello.

In the course of the subsequent manœuvres, during which the great review of the French army at Béthény was held, the Imperial couple visited Rheims. For the first time since the fall of the Second Empire, the choir of the cathedral intoned *Domine salvum fac imperatorem*. The Empress said later to me that this was a great reminder of the instability of all earthly power to her; the scene was beautiful, and she was sorry not to be able to linger and visit it properly, but the official programme had to be fulfilled.

Up to 1905 the Emperor and Empress went every year to St. Petersburg for the winter season. In 1901/2 and 1902/3 a *grand bal*, two or three concert balls, and several balls at the Hermitage Palace were given, followed by the *Folle Journée* before Lent. The Diplomatic Corps were received on New Year's Day, and were entertained to luncheon after the ceremony of blessing the waters, which took place on the ice of the Neva at Epiphany. The Empress was at this time in the full height of her beauty. The Emperor's favourite picture of her, the portrait by Kaulbach, was painted in 1903, and is an excellent likeness. Her well-cut features, upright figure, wonderful eyes, and golden hair made her the embodiment of what an Empress should be. Children and peasants did not need to see crown or mantle to know she was the "Tsaritsa." Her face was generally sad—it was her official expression, the photographic face of her youth. It seldom lighted up in public with the

particularly charming smile that those knew so well who saw her in private life.

The "season" of 1903 was marked by an especially beautiful costume ball, at which the Imperial Family and all the guests appeared in costumes of the time of Peter the Great's father, the Tsar Alexei. The Empress took the greatest interest in all the preparations for the ball, and designed both her own and the Emperor's costumes, with the help of the director of the Hermitage Museum, Ivan Alexandrovitch Vsevolojsky, who gave her the necessary historical information. The Emperor wore a copy of a real dress worn by the Tsar of the time, "raspberry and white with gold embroideries," wrote the Empress. His staff and headdress were specially brought for the occasion from the "Granovitaia Palata" at Moscow. The Empress was dressed as the Tsar Alexei's consort, the Tsaritsa Maria Miloslavskaia. She described it as "gold brocade with silver design, emeralds, pearls and diamonds." On her head she had a kind of mitre studded with jewels. A thin white handkerchief under the mitre, and yet another, quite thin and covering the hair, was stuck into the collar. None of the photographs of the Empress in this dress does her justice. Those who saw her agree that she looked perfectly lovely and an ideal Empress. Her jewels were real, of course. The long and heavy earrings of the time were such a weight that they had to be fastened with gold wire round her ears, and she told the author that her headdress was so heavy that she discovered at supper that she could not bend her head to eat!

Men and women of society vied with one another at this ball. The most gorgeous stuffs, jewels and furs were produced from private collections. Officers wore the uniforms of the time, Court people the dress of Tsar Alexei's court. The Grand Duchesses wore dresses of the style of their ancestors, designed by the greatest modern artists, the Grand Duchess Serge looking best of all.

The Empress and her three sisters, 1903.

From left to right : Princess Henry of Prussia, the Empress, Princess Louis of Battenberg.
Standing : Grand Duchess Serge.

The Empress's mauve boudoir in the Alexander Palace, Tsarskoe Selo.
She always used to lie and write on the sofa on the left.

Old Russian dances, carefully rehearsed, were danced, and the whole effect was marvellous.

This was the last great festivity of the Russian Court. The season of 1903/4 was cut short by the outbreak of the Japanese War, and no balls were ever given again. The autumn of 1903 saw the Imperial couple and their children at Darmstadt. Half the royalties of Europe were collected there for the wedding of the Empress's niece, Princess Alice of Battenberg, to the King of Greece's son, Prince Andrew. This, like all family events, was a matter of great interest to the Empress. She wrote of this engagement to her sister, Princess Louis: "May she be as happy as we are [the Emperor and herself], more one cannot wish" (August 16th, 1902).

The young couple were securely married—in the Orthodox church, the Protestant church, and at a civil wedding. In the middle of the wedding festivities, the Empress's young lady-in-waiting, Princess "Sonia" Orbeliani, fell desperately ill. She was an orphan, and the Empress, notwithstanding all the ceremonies at which she had to appear and the claims of her family, nursed her like one of her own children. Every free hour she spent with the half-conscious invalid, and when the whole wedding party moved to Schloss Wolfsgarten, the Empress motored up to Darmstadt sometimes thrice a day to see Sonia, which seemed almost a breach of etiquette to the stricter Court people.

After the wedding the Grand Duke of Hesse and his little daughter Elisabeth went with the Imperial Family to their shooting box at Skierniewice in Poland. This stay was planned principally to give the Grand Duke a change. He led a solitary life at Darmstadt, having just been separated from his first wife. Little Princess Elisabeth was a singularly captivating and beautiful child, adored by both her parents. She sickened soon after arriving at Skierniewice, having probably come to Poland

with the bacillus of typhoid in her, and she died in a few days from a virulent form of ambulatory typhoid. Wild stories were current at the time, but the *post-mortem* and the testimony of all the doctors leave no doubt as to the cause of her death.

It was a terrible blow to the Grand Duke and to the Empress, whose grief was increased by the fact that the tragedy should have happened in her house. It was only thanks to her moral support—she never left him—that her brother got through that dreadful time. After the Grand Duke had gone to his child's funeral at Darmstadt, the Empress fell ill, and had to be in bed for some time. She was completely worn out, for she always felt the sorrows of those dear to her even more acutely than her own.

CHAPTER XII

THE RUSSO-JAPANESE WAR AND BIRTH OF THE HEIR, 1904

CLOUDS were gathering on the horizon. The tension between Russia and Japan was growing more acute, though few people realised the evident danger. The general public and many statesmen treated with contempt the idea of a small Eastern Power challenging Great Russia. After a theatrical performance at the Hermitage Theatre, the Japanese Minister made a particularly low bow on taking leave of the Emperor. Seasoned diplomats noticed this and felt uneasy. It looked as if the polite Japanese were taking a private farewell of the Emperor, who had always been personally friendly to him. Two days later the Japanese bombarded the harbour of Port Arthur, and hostilities began.

For many years Russia had enjoyed the blessings of peace. Now St. Petersburg suddenly woke up in a war atmosphere. It is true that the Russo-Japanese War did not touch the vital chords of the country, as did the European conflict. Incomparably fewer men were mobilised. The loss of life was small when compared with that of 1914–1918. There was no question of food restrictions, or of changes in the life of the people. The great battles were fought so far away that the country had not the feeling of an enemy invading Russian soil. The real tragedy of that war was that it showed the country grave defects in government machinery. The revolutionary elements profited by this, and by the ferment which is the usual consequence of an unsuccessful war.

In St. Petersburg, the centre of government, the war occupied the minds of all classes.

The Empress Alexandra Feodorovna began at once to take an active part in war work. The Dowager-Empress headed the Red Cross, whilst her daughter-in-law started an immense workshop, or *sklad*, in the Hermitage Palace, to supply the ambulance trains with hospital garments, warm clothes, and medical materials. The Red Cross was incapable of coping with the wants of the military hospitals, as the supplies in Siberia were very small. The Empress sent warm clothing, and at Christmas in the next year thousands of presents, to the troops, at which she worked for whole days herself. Hundreds of women of all classes were busy in her workshop. All those who came were welcome, and the huge rooms were full. Every day the Empress went to her *sklad*. The doors leading to the Hermitage from the Winter Palace would open and the Empress would come in, preceded by a negro attendant, carrying her work. She went through all the rooms, talking to this person or that, sitting first at one table, then at another, speaking to the humblest workers, before going into the day's business with the ladies in charge. These were Princess M. M. Galitzine, the *Grande Maîtresse*, and Princess E. N. Obolensky, her maid-of-honour. The Empress considered every detail herself. Her clear and practical mind noted everything, and when she made suggestions she saw that they were carried out. She was, however, again in a delicate state of health, and, though she felt better than she usually did on such occasions, she had to give up active work in the summer when her confinement was near.

She wrote at this time to Princess Louis :—

> There is no end of work to be done, but it is a great comfort to be able to help one's poor sufferers a little. We have closed our work in the town now and re-open it in the English palace at Peterhof. . . . All work hard. Lilly [Princess E. N. Obolensky]

manages it splendidly. She has such a clear, practical brain and good memory. We work for the army hospitals (apart from the Red Cross) and for the well who need clothes, tobacco . . . and then we furnish [supply] military trains. . . . I like following all and not to be a mere doll. Yes, it is a trying time, but one must put all one's trust in God, who gives strength and courage. Unluckily I cannot get about at all and spend my days on the sofa . . . walking and standing causes me great pain. . . . I know I must lie, it is the only remedy (June 1904).

On August 12th, 1904, the longed-for son, the Cesarevitch Alexei Nicolaevitch, was born. Those who knew how the Empress had prayed and waited for this crowning happiness in her married life, and who understood the importance of direct succession in a country like Russia, can realise what this meant to her. Up to the last days before her son's birth, the Empress gave necessary audiences, and only a few hours before the event received a General who was leaving for the front. The boy was big and healthy, and early gave promise of great good looks. No signs of the haemophilia that afterwards developed in him were noticeable at the outset. Notwithstanding the serious atmosphere caused by the war, the baby's advent gave unmitigated joy to the parents. "My sunbeam," the Empress used to call her boy.

The whole country burst into frantic rejoicings. The news spread rapidly to every village in Russia, and great demonstrations took place. The baby's christening was like a pageant. No heir to the crown had been born in Russia, as heir, since the seventeenth century, and the ceremony was surrounded with splendour that matched the importance of the event. It took place in the Chapel of the big Peterhof Palace on August 24th, 1904. King George V of England (then Prince of Wales) and the German Emperor were among the baby's godfathers. The Empress Marie Feodorovna was his godmother. The baby Cesarevitch was appointed Colonel of many regiments and decorations were showered on him. Imperial

bounty in every form, amnesties, remittances of sentences, gifts of money were among the signs of the Emperor's joy at the birth of an heir. The baby throve through it all. At the ceremony of his baptism old Princess Galitzine once more carried an Imperial infant in her arms to church, and this time her task was still more difficult, as the result of a slip would have been even more terrible. Indeed, she was always in such terror of falling on these occasions, that she had rubber soles put to her shoes, court floors being proverbially slippery. The baby lay on a pillow of cloth of gold, slung to the Princess's shoulders by a broad gold band. He was covered with the heavy cloth-of-gold mantle, lined with ermine, worn by the heir to the crown. The mantle was supported on one side by Prince Alexander Sergeiovitch Dolgorouky, the Grand Marshal of the Court, and on the other by Count P. Benckendorff, as decreed by custom and wise precaution. The baby wept loudly, as might any ordinary baby, when old Father Yanisheff dipped him in the font. His four small sisters, in short Court dresses, gazed open-eyed at the ceremony, Olga Nicolaevna, then nine years old, being in the important position of one of the god-mothers. According to Russian custom, the Emperor and Empress were not present at the baptism, but directly after the ceremony the Emperor went to the church. Both he and the Empress always confessed to feeling very nervous on these occasions, for fear that the Princess might slip, or that Father Yanisheff, who was very old, might drop the baby in the font.

All went off perfectly, however, though on another occasion—I think it was at the baptism of the Grand Duchess Anastasia—the singular family likeness of Princess Galitzine and her sisters caused the Emperor a moment of great uneasiness. (She had three sisters, Mme. Ozeroff, Mme. Apraxine, and Mme. Boutourline, who all dressed in the same fashion as she did, and wore the same poke

bonnets.) On this occasion the Emperor was driving to the palace, where the christening had, so he was told, just taken place. On his way he passed Princess Galitzine's house, and, to his horror and surprise, thought he saw her sitting in front of it! She ought at that moment to have been in church in full Court dress, and fearing that something had happened, the Emperor stopped his *calèche* and jumped out. When he reached the deeply-curtseying lady, he saw that she was slightly younger than the *Grande Maîtresse*—that it was, in fact, someone else very like her! The Emperor said a few polite words to the old lady and never told her the fright she had given him, nor do I *know* if any but the members of his family realised that his hurried stop was not due to a sudden desire to make Mme. Boutourline's acquaintance!

Even at the time of his son's birth, affairs of State completely engrossed the Emperor. He was often absent, before and after the event, travelling about Russia, reviewing the troops that were to leave for the Far East. The Empress stayed with the baby. As soon as she was well enough to travel, she went with the Emperor and all the children for a cruise on the *Standart* to Reval, where the Emperor reviewed Admiral Rojdestvensky's ill-fated fleet, before it left on its glorious, but disastrous, voyage to the Far East.

At Tsarskoe Selo the Empress had her own little hospital, which she visited daily, though she did not nurse herself. She had a home for disabled soldiers built in the palace park. This was named the *Invalidny Dom*. The men were trained in all kinds of crafts. Some lived in the home, others only stayed long enough to learn a trade which would enable them to supplement their pensions and earn a living at home. This was the first thing of the kind ever done in Russia. The Empress put Count V. A. Schulenbourg at the head of this institution and continued to supervise it herself to the last.

The birth of the Cesarevitch Alexei gave the Empress popularity. The criticism that had been heard of her too great domesticity was heard no more. The Empress had done her duty to the country, and the knowledge of this gave her greater self-confidence.

There could be no question of great receptions in war time, but in the autumn of this year the Empress began to give dinners at Tsarskoe Selo for the young women of St. Petersburg society and their husbands. A whole series of these small dinners had been planned, and she had gone through long lists with Count Benckendorff, but only two dinners had been given when the news from the seat of war was so bad that the Empress had not the heart to continue entertaining.

In 1904 the Russian armies had a few minor successes, but the fleet suffered serious losses during the bombardment of Port Arthur. Many vessels had struck mines, among them Admiral Makaroff's flagship, the *Petropavlovsk*, which had been sunk with the gallant Admiral and nearly all his crew. The Grand Duke Cyril was one of those who escaped almost by a miracle after floating for hours among the *débris*. The Emperor balanced the successes against the disasters as chances of war. But in the country subterranean murmurings began to be heard. Revolutionary activity, which had not made itself felt since the beginning of the reign, was showing itself again, and Ministers whose policy was deemed too conservative were murdered in the streets.[1]

The Emperor and Empress, though greatly shocked, always put down these attempts as the work of international anarchists, and not of the home-grown revolutionary party. And it is true that the country as a whole was not revolutionary at this time. It was only among

[1] The Governor-General of Finland, Bobrikoff, was shot at on June 8th, 1904. The ultra-Conservative Minister of the Interior (Home Office), Plehve, was murdered at St. Petersburg on July 28th, 1904.

a small section of the workmen and among the poorer peasants of some of the provinces that the revolutionary agents succeeded in spreading their teaching. Dissatisfaction at the mobilisation, and the unsettled minds of the people gave them a fruitful field in which to increase their activities. Just before Christmas, 1904, Port Arthur fell. This had been considered impregnable, and its loss was a terrible blow to the national pride. Now all hopes were centred on the Baltic Fleet, but the conditions under which it had to fight were unfavourable. The enemy had every advantage, and, on the anniversary of the Coronation, May 27th,[1] 1905, the fatal battle of Tsoushima was fought, and Russia lost nearly all its fleet and thousands of gallant seamen. The horror of the moment when they heard the news of the disaster was never forgotten by the Emperor and Empress. The day of the Coronation was, after that time, a day, not of rejoicing, but of prayer. It always meant Tsoushima to them.

[1] With the change of century the anniversary of the Coronation became May 27 new style.

CHAPTER XIII

GATHERING CLOUDS, 1905

THE winter of 1905 was a time of anxiety and trouble. On January 22nd, 1905, the St. Petersburg workmen, led by the priest Gapone, a political agitator, made a demonstration in front of the Winter Palace. The crowd had various elements in it; some were hostile and seditious, some had been deceived by their leaders. The crowd would not disperse at the summons of the police. Troops were called in and were obliged to fire, and many workmen were killed and wounded.

At this time the Emperor was inadequately supported by his Ministers. Prince Sviatopolk-Mirsky, the Liberal successor to the reactionary Plehve, had tried to promote reforms, but had difficulty in fulfilling the promises made. The Empress was in despair at the state of the country and at the Emperor's embarrassments. She could not grasp the situation properly, as she had never before come face to face with Russian internal politics. The state of her mind is shown in a letter of January 27th, 1905, to Princess Louis of Battenberg:

. . . You understand the crisis we are going through! It is a time full of trials indeed. My poor Nicky's cross is a heavy one to bear, all the more as he has nobody on whom he can thoroughly rely and who can be a real help to him. He has had so many bitter disappointments, but through it all he remains brave and full of faith in God's mercy. He tries so hard, works with such perseverance, but the lack of what I call "real" men is great. Of course they must exist somewhere, but it is difficult to get at them. The bad are always close at hand, the

others through false humility keep in the background. We shall try to see more people, but it is difficult. On my knees I pray to God to give me wisdom to help him in his heavy task. I rack my brain to pieces to find a man and cannot; it is a despairing feeling. One is too weak, the other too Liberal, the third too narrow-minded and so forth. Two very clever men we have, and both are more than dangerous and unloyal. The Minister of the Interior is doing the greatest harm—he proclaims grand things without having prepared them. It's like a horse that has been held very tight in hand, and then suddenly one lets the reins go. It bolts, falls, and it is more than difficult to pull it up again before it has dragged others with it into the ditch. Reforms can only be made gently with the greatest care and forethought. Now we have precipitately been launched forth and cannot retrace our steps. All these disorders are thanks to his unpardonable folly and he won't believe what Nicky tells him, does not agree with his point of view. Things are in a bad state and it's abominably unpatriotic at the time when we are plunged into war to break forth with revolutionary ideas. The poor workmen, who had been utterly misled, had to suffer, and the organisers have hidden as usual behind them. Don't believe all the horrors the foreign papers say. They make one's hair stand on end—foul exaggeration. Yes, the troops, alas, were obliged to fire. Repeatedly the crowd was told to retreat and that Nicky was not in town (as we are living here this winter) and that one would be forced to shoot, but they would not heed and so blood was shed. On the whole 92 killed and between 200–300 wounded. It is a ghastly thing, but had one not done it the crowd would have grown colossal and 1000 would have been crushed. All over the country, of course, it is spreading. The Petition had only two questions concerning the workmen and all the rest was atrocious: separation of the Church from the Government, etc., etc. Had a small deputation brought, calmly, a real petition for the workmen's good, all would have been otherwise. Many of the workmen were in despair, when they heard later what the petition contained, and begged to work again under the protection of the troops. Petersburg is a rotten town, not an atom Russian. The Russian people are deeply and truly devoted to their Sovereign and the revolutionaries use his name for provoking them against landlords, etc., but I don't know how. How I wish I were clever and could be of real use! I love my new country. It's so young, powerful, and has so much good in it, only utterly unbalanced and childlike. Poor

Nicky, he has a bitter hard life to lead. Had his father seen more people, drawn them around him, we should have had lots to fill the necessary posts; now only old men or quite young ones, nobody to turn to. The uncles no good, Mischa, a darling child still. . . . [This was the Emperor's brother, the Grand Duke Michael Alexandrovitch, then heir-presumptive to the crown.]

Until the Great War the Empress took no interest in political matters. The sudden events of 1905 had greatly upset her. In the following years, when things seemed to be going on as before, the Emperor continued his habitual policy of never discussing political questions at home. The Empress scarcely ever touched on political events in her letters. She had her own interests, and exercised no influence whatever on public affairs during all those years.

The year 1905 saw the gradual spread of the revolutionary movement. On February 17th, 1905, the Grand Duke Serge, the Emperor's uncle and brother-in-law, was murdered in Moscow. The assassin's bomb literally blew him to pieces. He was specially hated by the revolutionists, as he belonged to the extreme reactionary party. The Grand Duke was murdered just after he had tendered his resignation. A more Liberal policy had been decided on, and the Grand Duke had told the Emperor that, as this was not in accordance with his political views, he could not, in the circumstances, honestly carry on his work. The Grand Duke and Grand Duchess were only staying in Moscow till their St. Petersburg palace was ready for them.

The unfortunate Grand Duchess was busy in her workroom at the Kremlin when the sound of the explosion reached her. She had an intuition that something had happened, rushed out, and saw the most terrible sight that a wife's eyes ever saw . . . She could never join in the life of the world again, and afterwards lived only for the poor and suffering.

The Grand Duke of Hesse, with his young newly-married second wife, and Princess Louis of Battenberg went at once to Moscow; the town was in a state of ferment, and further political risings were feared. The funeral was accordingly quiet, only the Grand Duke's brother Paul and his cousin and friend, the Grand Duke Constantine, being present. The Emperor did not go to Moscow, but the Empress Alexandra Feodorovna was prevented from going only by fear of the effect it might have on her son, whom she was still nursing. The Grand Duchess Serge's first thought was for her sister, and the effect the shock would have on her. She sent telegram after telegram, imploring her to take no risks, for the baby Cesarevitch's sake.

"It is very hard," the Empress wrote to Princess Louis on February 20th, 1905. But Princess Louis's presence at Moscow relieved a little of her anxiety and sorrow for the Grand Duchess Serge; for her two elder sisters were particularly attached to each other.

In these troublous times the Dowager-Empress joined the Emperor and Empress at Tsarskoe Selo and spent the winter with them. The news continued to be bad from all sides. The spring had brought the great naval disaster of Tsoushima. Commanders-in-chief were changed in the army, but still there were no important successes. The country was weary of the war, and in the face of the complications in the internal political situation it was thought inadvisable to persist in dragging on hostilities for another winter. The preliminaries for peace were discussed in America, and peace with the Japanese was signed by Count Witte at Portsmouth, U.S.A., on September 5th, 1905.

It is not generally known that in this matter the Emperor Nicholas II gave all the instructions to Count Witte himself. It was he who insisted that Count Witte should refuse the original conditions of the Japanese Government, which he

felt were incompatible with the honour of his country. He was determined that more favourable terms should be obtained, and telegraphed orders to this effect to Count Witte, authorising him to break off negotiations if the Japanese would not agree. This was disclosed by Count W. N. Kokovtzeff, a former Russian Prime Minister, who was Minister of Finance at the time, in a lecture given in Paris in May 1927.

Summer saw an agrarian movement spread from the Baltic provinces to many of the provinces of Central Russia. This movement had begun in February. Strangely enough, in many of the provinces the agitators made use of the Emperor's name, persuading the peasants that the Emperor was granting them the estates of the landlords as a reward for having fought in the war. In some places the organisers of the rising actually read out forged manifestoes.

Many officials were murdered. There were naval mutinies in both the Black Sea and the Baltic Fleets. In the autumn a general strike was proclaimed. Beginning with the railways, every pulse of Russia's life was paralysed. The opinions of Ministers were at variance. At first it was hoped to remedy the situation by calling in a deliberative assembly (*Sobor*), such as the old Tsars used to convene in times of great emergency.

After the general strike the Emperor appointed S. J. Witte as head of the Ministry, and on October 30th, 1905, an Imperial manifesto announced the institution of the Douma. The Douma's rights were wider than those of the *Sobor*, and the manifesto granted liberty of speech, of meeting, and *habeas corpus*. This did not produce any immediate results, except the calling-off of the general strike, but gradually S. J. Witte's statesmanship led the country into quieter channels.

In St. Petersburg there was considerable unrest, encouraged by the "Soviet of Workmen's Deputies," founded by Hroustaleff Nossar. The Government succeeded in

closing this, and had Hroustaleff Nossar arrested. He had lost the full support of the workmen; many were weary and returned to work, and when the *Soviet* was forcibly put down, it was already breaking up from within.

It took several years to quell the revolutionary waves. There were still Jewish pogroms in different places, and the end of 1905 saw a violent rising in Moscow, which was put down by the Semenovsky regiment. The agrarian troubles in the Baltic provinces took some time to suppress. During the mutiny in the fleet lying at Cronstadt, the Empress distinctly heard the roar of cannon from her little sitting-room in the seaside villa of Peterhof.

The Imperial couple were not frightened. In the stream of calumny showered upon them by their detractors, no one has ever dared to accuse them of want of personal courage. The Emperor was a fatalist. He did not know fear. With his wonderful self-command, the result of years of schooling, he always seemed calm and collected in whatever circumstances. In 1905, at the ceremony of the blessing of the waters, a live shell was fired in the salute, and flew over his head, crashing into one of the palace windows,[1] but the Emperor scarcely moved, though eye-witnesses say that the sign of the cross he made at the moment was perhaps more devout than prescribed by ritual. The Empress was equally brave. She considered the possibility of attempts on their lives as inseparable from their position, and never referred to, or stopped to think of, the subject. It was just a chance that had to be faced and with her deep faith she accepted the fact that all was in the hands of God. She was, of course, anxious sometimes in later years, though she never admitted it, when the Emperor was late at some function. She gave no sign, but her anxiety could be seen in the relief with which her face lit up as she welcomed him. Before the real danger of the mutiny at Cronstadt she never trembled; and the Emperor and Empress remained

[1] The author stood at that very window.

at Peterhof, with their children, though Cronstadt was nearly opposite.

The effect of character can be clearly seen in an incident that one of the Empress's ladies, Princess Obolensky, described to me. The Imperial yacht, the *Standart*, struck a rock during a cruise in Finnish waters (September 11th, 1907), happily, in broad daylight. The extent of the damage could not be seen at once. The yacht was fast making water and listed more and more to leeward, and the convoy, which drew more water, had not been able to follow the Imperial yacht into this particular channel. Sirens screeched, men ran about in obedience to commands from the officers. Boats were lowered. The *Standart* seemed to be sinking fast. The Empress was always resourceful and full of energy, and never lost her head in face of danger. She arranged that the children and the ladies' maids should be first lowered into the boats. Then with the help of her friend, Mme. Vyrouboff, she rushed into the cabins, tore the sheets off the beds and tossed all valuables into them, making huge bundles of the most necessary and precious things. It was all done in about a quarter of an hour. The Empress was the last woman to leave the yacht. The Emperor, through all the noise and rushing about, stood calmly on deck giving the necessary orders. Princess Obolensky, coming up to him, noticed he was holding his watch in his hand and bending down to look at the water-line. She asked him what he was doing. He said that he meant to remain on board to the last, and was counting how many inches a minute the yacht was sinking in order to know how long she would stay afloat He had calculated that there were still some twenty minutes ! Thanks to the watertight compartments, and to the measures taken by the commander, the yacht did *not* sink, and a passing Finnish boat, the *Ellekeinen*, took the Imperial party on board, whence they were moved to the cruiser *Asia*. Happily no one suffered from anything but great dis-

The Empress and the Cesarevitch. 1906.

The Empress and the Grand Duchesses Olga, Tatiana and Marie, 1908.

comfort and agitation. But had the seas been high, the matter would have been serious, for the yacht would undoubtedly have sunk, and the boats were very full.

The state of the country from 1905 to 1909 obliged the Imperial couple to give up any journeys away from St. Petersburg. The Emperor had to be in daily communication with his Ministers. The Douma was a new institution, and many questions arose in connection with it. Shooting in Poland was given up and the Crimea was not visited. The Ministers had great fears for the Emperor's life during these times of continual political murder. He was implored to give up his solitary rides in the Peterhof Park, and his shooting. He submitted, very grudgingly, only when it was pointed out to him that it was his duty to the country. On one point, however, the Emperor was firm : he would not abandon his long walks, and every day he went out, whenever he possibly could, generally alone. Both the Emperor and the Empress disliked the police measures that were taken on their account, and dodged the detective in the parks. The Empress felt that she was being "spied upon." The police who loitered round the palace in plain clothes greatly annoyed her. She enjoyed escaping from them and delighted in Haroun-al-Raschid expeditions. She liked to drive, without even a footman, with her children or her lady-in-waiting, and had her splendid Cossack on the box only on State occasions. She liked to stop, during her drives, to enter a church or a humble shop, or to admire a view. Often at Tsarskoe Selo she would drive slowly past some villa, for she liked to see into the houses unobserved. On her long drives in the woods round Tsarskoe and Pavlovsk, a mounted Cossack of the Emperor's escort rode at some distance behind her carriage, but occasionally she dismissed even him. This sometimes gave rise to complications, though the Empress would not admit it. On one occasion an inexperienced cyclist collided with the Empress's carriage in one of the narrow lanes. The

carriage had no room to swerve aside, and was overturned into the ditch, though happily none of its occupants was hurt. The coachman was hampered by the long padded coat that Russian coachmen wear (the Empress always drove *à la Russe*, the Court people only having the red Louis XV liveries). Finally Her Majesty herself held the struggling horses, while the young Grand Duchesses, the hapless cyclist and the coachman (when he had tucked up his robes), by their joint efforts, pulled the carriage out of the ditch.

The Empress always made light of this matter, fearing that the youth who had been the cause of the accident might get into trouble, or that the coachman's feelings would be hurt by an aspersion on his driving. She said that no Cossack could have prevented this happening, and continued her unattended drives.

CHAPTER XIV

ON THE *STANDART*, 1905–1912

AFTER the agitation of 1905 the country readjusted its political balance very quickly. Still, during the sessions of the first Douma subversive currents were very strong, and the state of political tension remained great.

To the Emperor and Empress the resumption of brilliant Court life seemed hardly suitable. They did not realise, of course, that the troubles of 1905 were only a general rehearsal of those of 1917, but they thought the times too grave for festivities. The mistake they made was in not replacing their large functions by more informal receptions of prominent politicians and people of note. By this means they would have kept in touch with the general atmosphere of the country, for, by their position, they were cut off from direct contact with public opinion, and, owing to their mode of life, the opinions they heard were nearly always those of the same people. However, simpler intercourse was not customary at the Russian Court, and both the Emperor and Empress, after a few unavailing efforts to make other changes in Court routine at the beginning of their reign, found that even an autocrat's power was helpless against the set rules sanctified by custom. They gave up attempts at innovations: the Emperor because he had no time, the Empress because any extra fatigue was already beginning to be too much for her strength, though she would never admit this. So, except two or three guests at luncheon, generally Ministers or high military officials, their life with their household settled down

into a quiet daily routine. The Empress wrote to Princess Louis of Battenberg on December 23rd, 1905 :

Twice a week the regiments from town come out here. The officers dine with us (*en famille*, quite simply), spend the night in the Big Palace, and the next morning is a review out of doors or in the riding school. . . .

Further on one has a glimpse of her anxieties :

Don't expect a long letter, one is not in the letter-writing mood. Nicky slaves like a nigger, many a day passes without his getting out, or if so, only in the dark. His poor head gets so tired, but he is brave and full of trust and hope in God's mercy.

There were a few indispensable official functions, but the Court no longer lived in St. Petersburg. All the winters were spent at Tsarskoe Selo, with occasional visits to the capital. This was no privation to the Empress, and the Emperor was so busy at that time that he would not, in any case, have been able to resume their former mode of life.

This retirement, mainly due to circumstances, had dire results in every way. The first was that the Empress gradually lost the popularity that she had begun to acquire after her son's birth. A very few people knew how charming she was : the rest did not know anything about her. Her circle narrowed more and more. Her letters are full of her children, who took up an increasing amount of her time as they grew up.

She wrote to Princess Louis on June 13th, 1905 :

The children are getting on nicely with their lessons, they have English and French masters too ; they ride much also, which they greatly enjoy. Baby is getting on, thank God, splendidly. Do have Louise [1] photographed, so as that I can get a good idea of her now, as a big girl ; Marie P.[2] also has her hair done up now.

My Nurses' School has been opened now and makes a nice impression. I only hope it will be a real success. . . .

[1] Now Crown Princess of Sweden.
[2] Grand Duchess Marie Pavlovna.

In summer the Court moved from Tsarskoe Selo to Peterhof. The Empress liked the small, unpretentious villa at the seaside, where all her children, except the eldest, had been born. She had loved the sea from childhood, and the greatest pleasure she had was when the Imperial Family were on their yacht, cruising in Finnish waters. This was the Emperor's only holiday. For some weeks his audiences and his work with the Ministers were interrupted. Messengers came daily from the capital, bringing him ministerial reports, but his day was free to do as he liked with—a rare treat for him. All possible formality was dispensed with, and the Court led a simple life, in which the officers of the yacht took part. The *Standart* was fitted out with every comfort. The Imperial Family's cabins were nearly as large as their rooms in the Peterhof villa, and were upholstered in pretty light chintzes. The Empress spent most of her day lying on a couch on deck, one of her daughters always staying with her when she did not feel well enough to go ashore. She was often joined by one or other of the officers, or by some of the Household, who sat and talked to her, while she worked or drew. The Emperor would go on shore with the gentlemen of his suite to walk or play tennis on a rather primitive court, and in autumn there was generally some shooting, in which the officers of the yacht joined. The young Grand Duchesses now went about with their father, replacing their mother, while the little Cesarevitch played with the ship's boys on the rocky beach. It was a healthy life for the young people, and the bracing air of Finland did them all good, particularly the delicate little boy, who, except on such occasions, never had real country air.

The stays on the yacht were sometimes prolonged until late in the autumn in the years when there were no visits to Poland or the Crimea, so loth were they all to return to the monotony of Tsarskoe Selo. Generally these cruises were limited to that part of the coast that lies between Cronstadt

and Helsingfors, for the Emperor had to be within easy reach of his Government. A favourite place of anchorage was the lonely bay of Pitkopas, near Biorke.

Here was typical Finnish scenery : rocky islands, with tall pines growing in the chinks of the grey granite, with no house in sight. Dark forests stretched far into the mainland, and here were hidden the few lonely fishermen's huts. The transparent waters were still and quiet in the wonderful " white nights " of May and June, when the light of one day lasted till the dawn of the next. The Empress loved the long, still days, the bright, moonlight nights on the water, the evening prayer of the sailors on deck before the lowering of the flag, when the last rays of the setting sun rested on the sea, on the woods, and on the escorting ships, while the deep voices of the men, singing the Lord's Prayer, echoed far away into the silence.

The Emperor was asked by the Ministers not to undertake any journeys by land in the years between 1905–1909. He therefore took advantage of these cruises to visit the naval bases in the Baltic, Baltisch Port, Reval, Libau and Riga. In the last-named town the Imperial Family were present in 1910 at the inauguration of the monument to Peter the Great, when great festivities took place. The Empress was very ailing then, and could with difficulty manage the necessary public appearances. She was not well enough to go on shore, and held receptions of the Baltic nobility on the yacht, while the Emperor and her daughters went to the functions on land.

Fewer foreign Royalties came to Russia in these years, but in June 1908 there were some family visits. King Edward and Queen Alexandra came on the *Victoria and Albert* to Reval for two days (June 9th), the Imperial Family meeting them on the *Standart*, and later in the summer King Frederick and Queen Louise of Denmark came with their daughters to pay their accession visit. Their stay, which was at Peterhof, was more of a family meeting than

Cesarevitch (X) and ship's boys,
Pitkopas, 1912.

The Cesarevitch, the Empress, and the
Grand Duchess Olga Nicolaevna 1913.

an official visit, and the whole Imperial Family then living in the neighbourhood took part in entertaining them.

That same year a whole galaxy of princes came to Tsarskoe Selo for the wedding of the Emperor's cousin, the seventeen-years-old Grand Duchess Marie Pavlovna, with Prince William of Sweden (May 3rd, 1908), which was celebrated with much splendour. The Grand Duchess and her brother, the Grand Duke Dimitry Pavlovitch, were the children of the Grand Duke Paul who lived almost entirely abroad, and they had been brought up by their uncle and aunt, the Grand Duke and Grand Duchess Serge, who had no children of their own. After the terrible shock of her husband's murder, the Grand Duchess Elisabeth Feodorovna could not face a life in the world again. She gave up all her palaces to her nephew and niece, and spent most of her fortune in founding a religious nursing community in Moscow, "The House of Martha and Mary," where she took up her abode. The two sisters then saw even less of each other than formerly. As the Grand Duchess was engrossed by her work, her influence with the Empress gradually became less.

The Grand Duke Dimitry became the Emperor's ward after the death of the Grand Duke Serge, and for a time lived at Tsarskoe Selo, to the great joy of his young cousins, the Emperor and Empress treating him as a son of the house.

The King of Sweden was among the princes present at the marriage of the Grand Duchess Marie Pavlovna to his son at Tsarskoe Selo.

The Swedish Royalties were seen several times during these years. In June 1908 the Imperial Family went on a State visit to Stockholm. The visit was one of those that the Empress most enjoyed. She liked the Queen, was interested to see her niece in her new home, and glad to meet one of her English cousins again, the Crown Princess Margaret (a daughter of the Duke of Connaught). A shadow was cast on their stay by an attempt made at the time on

the life of a prominent Swedish General. It was whispered that there were plots against the Emperor, and that this attempt was connected with them. For a whole day the Imperial Family were asked to remain on their yacht, the Swedish Royalties visiting them on board. However, this scare passed, and the Empress always looked back with pleasure to her stay in Sweden.

King Edward's visit was returned in 1909, the Imperial Family stopping at Cherbourg on the way to be present at the French naval manœuvres. President Fallières entertained his guests most splendidly on the *Montcalm*, but the visit was confined to Cherbourg, the Emperor and his family living on board the *Standart*, on which they had come. From Cherbourg they went to Cowes, where they were received by the King and Queen of England. It was just before the August Regatta Week, and Cowes was at its best and gayest. The stay was as unofficial as was possible in the circumstances, but was marked by a splendid naval review held in honour of the Emperor. It was an impressive sight, and the full significance of Great Britain's naval power was emphasised by the lines of mighty battleships and dreadnoughts, drawn up in three majestic rows, which thundered out a salute as King Edward and his Imperial guest passed them on the *Victoria and Albert*. The Empress wrote to Prince Louis that "dear Uncle had been most kind and attentive." She saw all her relations and some old friends, went to Farnborough to see the aged Empress Eugénie, her mother's friend, and remembered the days of her own youth in the surroundings she loved. Naturally, she stayed with the older people, but in her heart of hearts she would have preferred going about "the Island," as her children did, who derived much enjoyment from their expeditions ashore. It was the first time they had been anywhere abroad, except to Wolfsgarten and once to Princess Henry's place near Kiel, and they were at heart regular tourists.

This was the last time the Empress saw her mother's family. King Edward died within a year and the Empress never came to England again.

On their return from abroad the Imperial Family went to the Crimea for the first time for several years. The country had resumed its normal life outwardly, and an able Prime Minister, Piotr Arkadievitch Stolypine, was leading the Government wisely and well. He sympathised with Liberal ideas, without insisting on too sudden and radical reforms ; and he took advantage of the momentary lull to start a vast plan of agrarian reforms which would enable the peasants to become small landowners, and create an intermediate, Conservative class. It would have taken several years to bring this into force all over the country, and long before that could happen Stolypine was dead. He was murdered in September 1911, shot by a revolutionist in the theatre at Kieff during a gala performance given in honour of the Emperor's visit. The Emperor and his daughters were in the theatre at the time, the Empress's health having prevented her from joining them that night, and they came back full of horror at what they had seen. It was hoped at first that the Prime Minister might recover, but four days after he died (September 18th, 1911).

The loss of this great statesman was an irreparable one for the Emperor. Not only was he a great man, but he was loyal and faithful to his master, and had his full confidence. His murder seemed to thoughtful people an indication that the revolutionary organisations were active and ready to strike.

The Swedish return visit in 1912 was paid at Pitkopas, where country surroundings lessened the ceremony inseparable from an official visit, which would have been fatiguing both to Queen Victoria of Sweden and to the Empress. For two days the Swedish and Russian anthems seemed never to cease being played, as the Swedish and

Russian Royalties exchanged visits on their respective ships. Both the Russian Minister for Foreign Affairs and his Swedish colleague, Count Ehrenswaert, were present, and took part in the State dinner on the *Standart*, and at the luncheon on the *Manligheten*. Here again a sad incident occurred. During the salute on the Swedish man-of-war a gun exploded, and several men were killed and wounded. Such incidents always strengthened the Empress's belief that ill-luck attended them. The Emperor had been born on Job's day, and she could not escape from the feeling that something was against them.

During the summer cruise of 1912, in June, the Russian sovereigns had a brief meeting with the German Emperor, who came to Baltisch Port on his yacht, the *Hohenzollern*. Both Royal parties stayed on their yachts. The Emperor Nicholas, as usual, was an amiable host, while the Empress took part in the entertainments only when it was absolutely necessary, and all present commented on her appearance of extreme fatigue. This was William II's last visit to Russia.

That same summer's stay at Pitkopas was enlivened by the visit of the Dowager-Empress, who came on the *Polar Star* on August 6th, and gave a dance on board for her granddaughters. The Empresses sat side by side on deck, watching the dancing, the Emperor beside them, evidently deeply appreciative of his mother's visit. This was a real happy family meeting, without any untoward incident to spoil it.

Since 1905 the Empress had had other troubles besides the political troubles of Russia to distress her, troubles that gnawed constantly at her heart and sapped her vitality. The apple of her eye was her boy, the child of so many prayers. She had waited for him for so long and had put her whole soul into her supplications for the granting of her heart's desire. Her overwhelming joy at his birth can only be understood by those who saw that

outwardly reserved woman in church, pouring out her soul in intense prayer.

The baby was beautiful. He developed rapidly and seemed a strong, fine child: his teething gave him no trouble, and he was exceptionally bright and well developed. The proud parents exhibited the splendid little fellow to the public whenever they could. He was not a year old when, in his mother's arms, he was shown to the soldiers at a review, and "Baby behaved well." When he started trotting about, independently, and had occasional tumbles, the Empress noticed that the boy seemed to suffer more from his bumps than the small accident warranted. In deadly terror, but without speaking of it to anyone, Alexandra Feodorovna watched her darling, with a fear in her heart that she did not dare to put into words. As the child grew older and more active, he developed the typical swellings that pointed to haemophilia,[1] the dreadful disease from which one of her uncles had suffered, and the Empress realised that her only son, her beloved "Sunbeam," had the same terrible weakness.

Doctors confirmed her fears, though they said that the Cesarevitch was suffering from a mild form only of the disease. His mother's despair can be imagined at hearing her worse fears confirmed. Her agony was the more acute as she knew that it was through her that the boy had inherited the illness. She was in no way to blame, but this did not lessen her terrible feeling of responsibility. Both she and the Emperor hid their anxieties from the world, hoping against hope that there might be some mistake. Alexei Nicolaevitch was perfectly well and strong between his attacks, which were caused only by some rash movement on his part, and the Empress always hoped that in the

[1] Haemophilia is a weakness of the finer blood vessels, causing internal haemorrhage at the slightest knock. Large swellings form which cause acute pain in dispersing, and any accident can prove fatal if the haemorrhage is too violent. No operation can ever be performed on people suffering from this condition.

intervals a merciful Providence had wrought a miracle. Once, two whole years passed without a single hæmorrhage. The mother revived, her health improved, she looked her former self. Alas ! it proved to be a forlorn hope. The boy fell ill again, and though the cause was hidden from everyone, and the parents still trusted that he might completely recover, the doctors had few illusions.

This grief destroyed the Empress's joy in life. The look of sadness, that had always from time to time come over her face, now settled on it for ever. For the sake of her boy's future, she hid her sorrow so well that in the country the nature of the Cesarevitch's complaint was unknown. It was whispered about in the palace, but even there no one knew definitely what was the reason of his frequent sudden illnesses.

The strain under which she lived told gradually on the Empress's health. She was obliged to keep more and more to her sofa. Her heart began to trouble her in 1908. She never complained ; it was even difficult to make her say how she really felt, but any exertion became such a visible effort that the doctors warned the Emperor about her health, and a cure at Nauheim was prescribed. The Empress disliked intensely the idea of "making a fuss" about herself. "It was despairing," she said to Princess Louis of Battenberg. In another letter (June 5th, 1910) to her sister, she wrote :

Don't think my ill health depresses me personally. I don't care, except to see my dear ones suffer on my account, and that I cannot fulfil my duties. But once God sends such a cross, it must be borne. Darling Mama also lost her health at an early age. I have had so much, that, willingly, I give up any pleasures —they mean so little to me, and my family life is such an ideal one, that it is a recompense for anything I cannot take part in. Baby [Alexei Nicolaevitch] is growing a little companion to his father. They row together daily. All 5 lunch with him daily, even when I am laid up.

The whole family were to go with the Empress to Nauheim, and it was arranged that they should be the guests of the Grand Duke of Hesse at his castle of Friedberg, where the Empress could take advantage of her cure to see her brother and sisters ; for Princess Louis of Battenberg, with her children, and Princess Henry of Prussia were also at Friedberg.

Alexandra Feodorovna's devotion to her family had not lessened in the years of separation. The Empress continued to look up to her eldest sister, feeling in addition to her love a deep admiration for her clear and active mind ; and she was on excellent terms with her brothers-in-law. With Princess Henry, a common sorrow knit her even closer, for each had a child for whose life she trembled ; and Princess Henry seized every opportunity to come to her youngest sister, understanding her anxiety as could only another mother who knew the same grief. The Grand Duke of Hesse's lively temperament was outwardly just the opposite to the Empress's, but there were traits in his character that were very like hers, and he always kept the first place in her affection. He was now happy in his second marriage, and his two small sons were the Cesarevitch's constant playfellows at Friedberg.

During nearly all her stay the Empress was so ailing and so much tired by her cure that she could not go about, and for the most part lay on a couch in her room or in the garden, with one of her sisters or one of her old friends to keep her company. She was often not able even to come down for meals, but when she felt stronger, she was wheeled in her bath-chair to shop with her sisters at Nauheim, an amusement which she enjoyed like a child. The Emperor and his daughters motored a great deal with their host, and were sometimes so badly mobbed both at Homburg and at Frankfurt, when the public recognised them, that they had to escape through back doors to their

cars. The last three weeks of their stay were spent at Wolfsgarten, where the German Emperor came for a day on a surprise visit, arriving unexpectedly in shooting dress.

Though the Emperor was very fond of all his wife's family, the long stay abroad in 1910 was a little trying to him. He was such a true Russian that he always became homesick after three or four weeks out of his own country. The Empress had undertaken this cure against her own wishes, agreeing to undergo the treatment for her family's sake. She was glad when the cure was over, and the return to Tsarskoe Selo was hailed with joy by all, though the actual moment of parting from her own people was always hard to the Empress. The cure had not, on the whole, done her very much good.

There is not much to note in the Empress's private life in 1911–1912. She was mostly ailing, going about for a short time and then paying for it by weeks on the sofa. Her letters to Miss Jackson give a glimpse of her life :

PETERHOF,
May 31st/June 13th, 1911.

DARLING MADGIE,—Very tenderest thanks for your dear letter. We came over here on Saturday and hope to go to sea on Saturday. We long for that rest, my husband has been working like a nigger for 7 months and I have been ill nearly all the time. The quiet cosy life on board always does us good, so I hope to get a little better, so as not to be always lying. Ernie [1] and his wife will be over for the Coronation.[2] May all go off well, and the heat not be too intense; here it is quite cold since a week, and even frost by night. The children are growing up fast. In November Olga will be 16, Tatiana is almost her size 14—Marie will be 12, Anastasia 10, Alexei 7. I send them to reviews with their Father, and once they went to a big military luncheon and made circle with the ladies, as I could not go—they must get accustomed to replace me, as I rarely can appear anywhere, and

[1] Grand Duke of Hesse.

[2] King George V's.

The Empress in her bedroom at Tsarskoe Selo, 1910.

The Cesarevitch, the Emperor and the Grand Duke Dimitry, Livadia, 1911.

when I do, am afterwards long laid up—over-tired muscles of the heart.

Must end now. Good-bye—God bless you, darling. When do you go to Harrogate? Ella spent a week at Zarskoe with us, looked well, pink and cheery.

A tender kiss from your old

P.Q. No. III,

Alix.

Peterhof,
August 19, 1912.

Darling Madgie,—Loving thanks for yr last dear letter—forgive me for being such a shockingly bad correspondent. I had Victoria's [1] visit for a week, wh. was delightful, and Ella [2] came also for 3 days, and I shall see her again in Moscow. Ernie [3] and family we had in the Crimea, Waldemar [4] came for 3 days on the *Standart* in Finland, and Irene [5] will come at the end of September to us in Poland, Spala. She was there before, and so we thought she would like to come again after 11 years. Next week we leave for Borodino and Moscow, terribly tiring festivities, don't know how I shall get through them. After Moscow in spring I was for a very long time quite done up—now I am, on the whole, better. What terrible rains and storms you have in England—such a calamity. Here we had colossal heat and scarcely ever a drop of rain.

If you know of any interesting historical books for girls, could you tell me, as I read to them and they have begun reading English for themselves. They read a great deal of French and the 2 youngest acted out of the Bourg. Gentilhomme and really so well, make Victoria tell you all about it. Four languages is a lot, but they need them absolutely, and this summer we had Germans and Swedes, and I made all 4 lunch and dine, as it is good practice for them.

I have begun painting flowers, as alas have had to leave singing and playing as too tiring.

Must end. Goodbye and God bless and keep you.

A tender kiss fr. Yr. fondly

Loving old P.Q. No. III,

Alix.

[1] Princess Louis of Battenberg.
[2] Grand Duchess Serge.
[3] Grand Duke of Hesse.
[4] Prince of Prussia, nephew.
[5] Princess Henry of Prussia.

In 1912 all Russia celebrated the centenary of the French invasion and retreat. The Imperial Family went to Moscow for the inauguration of the monument to Alexander III, then to Smolensk, and to the battlefield of Borodino, September 8th, where the monument commemorative of 1812 had been erected. Here a score or so of old men (the oldest was said to be 122), who had been small children when the great battle was fought, were assembled for the Emperor to meet them. They all had the deep religious reverence of the old-time peasant for the Emperor, but some were getting a little childish and were not quite sure if they were in the presence of Nicholas II or of the *Blagoslovenny*—" The Blessed One," as the people called Alexander I—who had been Russia's Emperor in 1812. The expression of their faces when they talked to the Tsar was like what Simeon's must have been when he said his *Nunc Dimittis*. This whole ceremony made a great impression on the Empress, and she left cheerfully looking forward to a few weeks of quiet and her sister's visit.

CHAPTER XV

A MOTHER'S AGONY—RASPUTINE

AFTER the Moscow centenary celebrations, the Imperial Family went to Poland—the first visit for several years. At the shooting box at Belovege, their first stop, the little Cesarevitch injured himself while jumping out of a boat. Internal haemorrhage set in, heralding the most severe and dangerous attack he had ever had. His parents were greatly alarmed, but, as usual, his illness was at first made light of, and no one suspected that it was serious. Recovery was slow, but, by early September, Alexei Nicolaevitch was well enough for the family to go on to the other Imperial shooting lodge at Spala. A further fall, however, caused a bad relapse; the inner bleeding began again, and a large tumour in the groin developed, which caused the most excruciating pain and the risk of blood poisoning and peritonitis. No operation was possible. His temperature rose alarmingly and the swelling pressed on all the inflamed nerves of his leg. At first the poor child cried loudly, but as his strength gave out, this was followed by a constant wailing, which grew hoarser and hoarser. He could take no food and could find no restful position in bed. Sometimes his sailor servant, Derevenko, would carry the wasted little creature for hours in his strong arms when the child thought that movement might ease the pain. Sometimes he lay back in the pillows, growing thinner and more deathlike every day, as the weakness increased, his great eyes looking like coals in his little, wan, drawn face. Even now his

condition was hidden from the public for fear that he might be considered a permanent invalid. His parents still hoped for an improvement, and to hide their anxiety and prevent gossip about the child's illness they continued to lead their ordinary lives. Visitors were invited and the Emperor received the Ministers, who came from St. Petersburg. Princess Henry of Prussia was on a visit to her sister at this time, and was a particular comfort to her, as she had lost a son from the same dreadful illness. The Empress was in an agony, seeing him and being unable to relieve his intolerable suffering. The little boy cried for death to release him: until then no one had realised that the child, just eight years old and shielded from all sorrow, could know the real meaning of the word. He would beg to be buried "in the light" with the blue sky over him.

"When I am dead, it will not hurt any more, will it?" he would ask his mother. "Mamma, help me!" was his continual cry; for the Empress had always been able to soothe him and ease his pain in his earlier attacks. But now she was powerless. She could only hold him in her arms, like a baby, caressing him, trying to find some position in which he could for a moment feel easier, while his terrible, heartbreaking wailing went on.

Celebrated doctors had been called in, but their science could do nothing, and Professor Fedoroff warned the Emperor (through Count Freedericsz) that the case seemed hopeless. Bulletins were issued; the Cesarevitch was prayed for in church. A chapel was arranged in a tent in the grounds at Spala, and all the Household took part in daily prayers, the Cossacks of the escort singing the service. Throughout the whole country there was great alarm. The little boy had a winning personality; the country was proud of him. Even the guarded bulletins did not conceal his danger; indeed Professor Rauchfuss told me that the doctors worded the evening bulletin on

the worst day in such a manner as to be able to follow it by an announcement of the child's death. That same evening, Princess Henry asked the Household to disperse at an unusually early hour, saying that the news was bad. The Empress sat with her boy, stroking his forehead and pressing his hands; he was too weak to return the caress. The Emperor went in and out, with a man's helplessness in illness, his face literally ageing with anxiety.

It was at that moment that the Empress turned in despair to a wonder-worker, a faith-healer, whom she had seen before when she had been anxious about her son. He had prayed, and his words had greatly impressed her, and it had seemed to her that there was an improvement in the boy when he came during his attacks. The doctors had told her that they could do nothing more. She telegraphed to the healer, asking for his prayers. His answer came that same evening and was consoling. He told her the child would not die, and the next morning, October 22nd, Alexei Nicolaevitch was better.

From that day the improvement continued. The doctors pronounced him out of danger, and in November he was moved to Tsarskoe Selo, where he ultimately completely recovered from the attack, though he had a contraction of the muscles of the leg that made him very lame for more than a year. The Empress felt that she had witnessed a miracle. The child had been dying, and Rasputine's prayers had called him back from death. She was too humble a Christian to attribute anything to her own supplications. Rasputine was a saint, and as such she thereafter treated him: indeed, it seemed almost blasphemy to her to speak of him otherwise.

"Why should humanity nowadays," she said to me, "be deprived of the comfort and support given to former generations?" St. Seraphim of Saroff had not lived so very long ago and the Church had canonised him. Thus she reasoned, in her conviction that to her, too, had been

vouchsafed the blessing of seeing a wonder-working saint walk upon this earth.

The story of Rasputine and of the Empress's introduction to him has been told so often, and so inaccurately, that I think it right to give the correct version of the facts, as I know them to have been. To those who say that it is incredible that the Empress of Russia could pin her faith to such a person, it is necessary to point to the followers of Mme. Blavatsky, Mrs. Besant, Dr. Steiger, and the many staunch believers in Christian Science. In the case of Alexandra Feodorovna, mysticism was combined with a blind clinging to anything that might save her child, easily understood by some Russian minds, in whom religion is curiously mixed with superstition. An English, German or French brain cannot quite understand her mentality, which was a mixture of Western mysticism and her newly-acquired, somewhat narrow Orthodoxy; and, like many converts, Alexandra Feodorovna surpassed even the usual Russian attitude to religion. Her faith was pure and ingenuous; coupled with this were her love, as a mother, for her child and her longing, as an Empress, to save the life of the heir to a vast Empire. She had often previously begged for Father John of Cronstadt's prayers for herself and her child. When the Empress received Rasputine, she was convinced that the path she had chosen was the right one —that the criticisms and obstacles were only the thorns in the path of those who strive to follow righteousness.

When, through her friendship with the Grand Duchesses Militza and Stana, she became interested in mystical questions, she developed a belief in the existence of people in the world, who, by their saintly lives, can become links between humanity and God. These beings are chosen by Providence to help and sustain their weaker brethren. Their prayers work miracles and the gift of knowing the future is vouchsafed to them. The wise

men, the "Yogi" of India, were people of this kind; they were called, in Russia, the *Staretz* or *Stranniki*. A *Staretz* is a layman who has renounced the world and, without entering any special order, leads a monastic life. Some spend their time going from pilgrimage to pilgrimage, praying for the salvation of mankind; some live the lives of hermits: the ecclesiastical authorities look upon them most benevolently. Educated Russians of the old-fashioned type treat them with respect. Peasants go to them for help and advice. They admonish, pray, doctor sometimes, though, as a rule, they minister only to spiritual needs, exhorting those who come to them to penitence and confession, preparing them for absolution at the hands of a priest. Peasants believe these *Starzi* to have the gift of prophecy, given them as a recompense for their ascetic lives, and consider them almost saints and on the high road to canonisation. They are generally old men, as was the revered *Staretz* of Optina Poustin, to whom Leo Tolstoy went for counsel before his death. Many have been worldly in youth. As Count Keyserling says in his preface to *Der Russische Christ*, to the average Russian mind, the Just, the Blameless do not seem so near in heart as those who have known human frailty and temptation and have conquered and repented.

A venerated, saintly *Staretz* often has more influence with the people than a village priest. The *Starzi* have no official standing in the Church; they are a survival of the early apostolic teaching, which still prevails in remote parts of Russia. They wander on foot through the country, speaking of the holy places they have seen: the Holy Land, Mount Athos, or the great Russian monasteries. They quote whole pages of Holy Scripture and prayers. The Russian peasant is too poor to own a Bible; he knows the prayers that he has learned in his childhood and those that he hears in church, but except for this, his religious knowledge is small. He listens with

delight to the pious talk of the pilgrims, who recount the lives of saints and stories of marvellous healings and miracles, all the semi-mysticism that an uneducated Russian loves.

As early as 1901 the Empress had made the acquaintance of a French mystic, M. Philippe, a kind of clairvoyant as well as a faith-healer. He had preached to her that, if she submitted to the decrees of Providence and strove for spirituality, she would always find teachers who would strengthen her faith. Philippe had studied medicine and had adapted theosophical ideas to his practice, treating his patients by prayer. He told the Empress in 1902 that she would have her longed-for son. This prediction was not fulfilled at that time, for in September a bulletin was issued, stating that the hopes of the Empress had suffered disappointment.

Philippe's teaching bore fruit. When he left, the Empress was prepared for him to be replaced by another teacher. Again the Grand Duchesses heard of a man with wonderful gifts of prayer, and introduced him to the Empress. This was Gregory Rasputine. He was one of the wandering pilgrims, who are often *Starzi* in the making, and, some time before, his piety had attracted the notice of Hermogene, Archbishop of Saratoff. Rasputine was a Siberian peasant from the village of Pokroffskoe, in the far-away province of Tobolsk. His youth had been wild. There were stories of horse-stealing and of other unedifying things. He married, had children, and then, quite accidentally, fell under the influence of a priest, who so much impressed him with the error of his ways that he left his home and started on a pilgrimage, intending to devote his life to repentance and prayer. Thereafter he went from monastery to monastery with quotations from the Gospels on his lips, dressed as a pilgrim, and loaded with the heavy iron chains of the penitent. He had the gift of sincere and impassioned prayer; his faith

was increased by his pilgrimages, and he soon gained the reputation of a saintly man and a healer among the Siberian people. In 1905 he appeared in St. Petersburg, was received with respect in pious circles, and patronised by the Archbishop Theophane, rector of the Ecclesiastical Academy, a universally revered prelate and at that time the Imperial confessor. When the Empress heard of him, it is probable that her first idea was that he might do something for her boy; for she was just beginning to realise the nature of Alexei Nicolaevitch's illness. The Emperor asked his confessor's advice, and, according to M. Paléologue,[1] the Archbishop even advised the Imperial couple to receive the pilgrim.

Father Alexander Vassilieff, the Emperor's other confessor, also looked with favour on Rasputine at first. He thought him sincere, and tried to gain an influence over him. Father Vassilieff was an honest man, and when, in the course of time, he began to doubt whether Rasputine was, as he was said to be, "fighting the evil in him enough," he was much troubled about his own course of action.

The opinion of a confessor is so important to a Catholic or an Orthodox mind that the judgment of mere laymen cannot compare with it. In July 1906 the Emperor and Empress saw the healer for the first time. The Emperor mentions the date in his diary, simply noting, "Have seen *Boji Tchelovek*—the man of God, Gregory."

He was "Gregory Effimovitch" to the Emperor and Empress, "Father Gregory" to other believers; but he

[1] Paléologue reports the Archbishop's advice to the Emperor as follows: "'Gregory Effimovitch,' he said, 'is a peasant, a man of the people. Your Majesties will do well to hear him, for it is the voice of the Russian soil which speaks through him. . . . I know all the charges against him. . . . I know his sins, which are numberless and most of them heinous. But there dwells in him so deep a passion of repentance and so implicit trust in Divine pity that I would all but guarantee his eternal salvation. Every time he repents he is as pure as the child washed in the waters of baptism. Manifestly, God has called him to be one of His chosen.'" I do not know how M. Paléologue got this account of the Archbishop's conversation; but I have every reason to believe it to be correct.

had with the Imperial couple the respectful manner of the peasant before his sovereign. There was something in the Emperor, simple as he was, that made any familiarity in his presence unthinkable; but Rasputine kept his gruff way of speech and spoke as authoritatively to the Emperor as he would have spoken to a commoner. The Empress saw him solely with religious eyes, neither the uncouth peasant, nor the man, but the helping spirit sent in her hour of need. She trusted, from the first, that his prayers might cure her son. She, who disliked all publicity, hid both the fact of the child's illness and of her meeting with the *Staretz*. She wanted the world to believe in the boy's health. She knew that Court circles had criticised her interest in Philippe, and she felt that a storm of talk and bitter comment would be aroused if it were known that she was interested in Rasputine. She knew the conservatism of the people around her, and thought that class prejudice would make Rasputine, a *moujik*, seem even more objectionable than Philippe, as a visitor to the Palace. She did not realise that there were other reasons that alarmed her devoted *entourage*, and that anything that might give rise to misinterpretation is dangerous to one in a high position.

Everything that concerned her religion—"her soul," as she expressed it—had been hidden jealously by the Empress since her childhood. She felt that in this, at least, she had a right to "privacy." Unfortunately, this word cannot exist for sovereigns. Every word, every gesture is seen or heard and remarked on. The most insignificant details of their lives can take on a vast importance. The story that a wandering pilgrim, a faith-healer, had been received by the sovereigns was spread abroad and widely commented on.

The Empress forgot, when she imagined that these visits of Rasputine were not known, that every person who passed through the gates of the Palace had his name written down

several times by police and officials. Every step the Imperial Family took, every person they saw, were noted by the police and also in the minutely-detailed Court Circular seen by the Master of the Household every evening. Leaf by leaf, this was eventually bound, to form large volumes, recording every single day of their lives, as the lives of all their predecessors had been recorded. Every visit of Rasputine to the Empress was known to dozens of people, and the mystery which surrounded these audiences aroused much curiosity and gave rise to many tales. At first Rasputine saw their Majesties very seldom, not more than three or four times a year, but later the Empress saw him oftener, but never more than once in a couple of months.

Nevertheless, the appearance of such a personage in the precincts of the Palace was bound to make a stir. The Emperor and Empress had by this time realised that anyone to whom they showed any special mark of favour would be immediately pecked at and intrigued against. They imagined that this was the cause of the feeling against Rasputine. When rumours against him were reported to the Empress, she supposed them to be due to jealousy and class prejudice.

By 1912 Rasputine had established himself in St. Petersburg, where he began to find many disciples. People of all sorts came to his modest flat: mothers and wives asking for his prayers for their children and husbands; love-sick maidens seeking for his advice in their love-affairs; drunkards imploring him to cure them; the sick, beggars and petitioners of every kind, ultra-pious people as well as those interested in mystic questions. He was one of those men who create fanatics. Knowing what sin was, he always preached repentance, always upbraided his hearers, roughly, in his imaginative peasant language for their sins and weaknesses. He gave advice to everyone; and to the poor he gave all the money that his admirers

gave him, keeping only enough for his simple needs. He remained a peasant, with a peasant's tastes. To the last day of his life he wore peasant's clothes, dressing like the small *élégants* of his class, in silk shirt and fine glossy boots. Women were his particular admirers. They came in great numbers and treated him almost as a god. This was his undoing. He gave up his pilgrimages through the country and stayed in St. Petersburg, going from house to house, visiting his admirers. He was now only a man of about fifty. Real *Starzi* were always very old men, who had left worldly temptation far behind. With the opportunities he had of better living, he soon began to drink more than was good for him. This led him on, it is said, to worse excesses, in which the inborn coarseness of his nature made itself apparent. After each bout his contrition was equally extreme and was followed by a renewal of religious ardour. His soul seemed to be divided into two parts: the one a kind of heaven and the other a kind of hell, in each of which he seemed to dwell in turn. His lapses caused his ecclesiastical patrons, the Archbishops Hermogene and Theophane, to renounce him. The Grand Duchesses Militza and Stana Nicolaevna also gave up seeing him and warned the Empress of the rumours against him. The only result of their intervention was their loss of the Empress's friendship. Alexandra Feodorovna believed that intriguers had influenced her cousins and the Archbishops. It seemed to her a plot to rob her of the man who had given her peace of mind. She repeated all the praise of Rasputine that she had heard from his early and now disillusioned admirers.

One must remember that at his rare and short appearances in the Palace Rasputine never forgot that he was a peasant before the Tsar and Tsaritsa; he showed them only his good side, and that so convincingly that they would not believe that any bad side existed. He could always find the right word to allay their anxieties for their boy:

apt quotations from the Gospels or from the lives of the saints, or a short, earnest prayer. The Empress would become tranquil again, with the conviction that all would be well. Had he only *once* tried to strike another note, Rasputine would not have kept his power, for the Empress was very easily shocked by human weaknesses.

It is perhaps worth noting that Alexandra Feodorovna was always a believer in faith-healing. Once in the course of conversation I mentioned a case I had read of in the papers concerning some children who had died of diphtheria, and whose parents were prosecuted for not sending for a doctor, but trusting to a faith-healer's prayers. I expressed my indignation at such folly being possible with all the resources of science within reach. The Empress astonished me by saying "My dear, they did not pray hard enough. Had their prayers been fervent, the children would have recovered!" The Empress was never a great believer in doctors; which perhaps is not surprising, seeing how little is known of haemophilia or its cure. Rasputine was sent for only when the Cesarevitch fell ill. He always managed to come when there was a tendency to improvement, which the Empress believed to be due to his intercessions. It is more likely that he had his own sources of information, and contrived to come in time for the recovery of the child to be attributed to him. By this means he kept the Empress's faith: she came to look on him as a kind of guardian angel to her idolised boy. Nonsense has been written about Rasputine's drugging the Cesarevitch or hypnotising the mother and son. Nothing of the kind ever happened. The story that Anna Vyrouboff gave "potions" to the Cesarevitch on the advice of a Tibetan doctor, Badmaieff, a friend of Rasputine, is also pure invention. Badmaieff never came to the Palace, and the Empress would not have countenanced anything of the kind.

In 1911 Rasputine went on a pilgrimage to Jerusalem, from which he returned more deeply venerated than ever

by his admirers. After 1912, when, as she believed, he had saved the Cesarevitch's life at Spala, the Empress pinned all her faith upon him. She would not entertain a doubt as to his sanctity. The Emperor was less credulous, and had inquiries made by the police as a result of warnings from his Ministers. Unfortunately, though the main charges against Rasputine, accusing him of immoral conduct with women, were probably true, he was able in one case to prove an *alibi*, having been at Tsarskoe Selo, when he was supposed to have been at St. Petersburg. That was enough to disprove the whole report in the Emperor's eyes. The enemies of Rasputine were believed to be working simply in order to oust the man of the people from the Palace. Still, in 1912, Rasputine, as a result of a direct appeal from the Prime Minister, Kokovtzeff, to the Emperor, was told to go back to his native village, as Kokovtzeff pointed out to the Emperor that the stories of Rasputine's visits were damaging to the Imperial prestige.

Rasputine at that time was much in the public eye. He had quarrelled with a former friend of his, the monk Iliodor, who had broken his vows and gone abroad. Iliodor threatened to publish some letters belonging to Rasputine, which had come into his possession. Among these there were a few unimportant notes from the Empress to Rasputine. It was this threat that led to the Prime Minister's representations to the Emperor. The book of letters was not published in Russia, but the harm was done. Garbled accounts of the tenor of the Empress's letters were quoted on all sides, and Rasputine was falsely believed to have great influence at Court. When he returned to St. Petersburg, his *clientèle* increased. Professional political intriguers, unscrupulous senior officials, who hoped that he might casually mention their names to the authorities, junior officials, who hoped that he might speak of them to their chiefs, all came to Rasputine's flat. Society women, as well as many of his own class, came to him, some from

curiosity, others with the hope (which was not realised) that it might bring them into contact with the Court.

At the time of the outbreak of the war Rasputine's unpopularity had become extreme. Notwithstanding this, many distracted mothers and wives came to ask for his prayers, hoping that he might enlighten them as to the future in store for their dear ones. Women were doing this in every war country in those dark years. If Rasputine had not been there, the wives and mothers of Petrograd [1] would have gone to some other seer. The danger was, in this case, that he gave all these people an impression that his influence in the Palace was far greater than it was. I was told that he was a great boaster and would interrupt an interview in order to answer a pretended telephone call from the Palace. General Ressine, who had all the Palace telephone conversations noted down in his police reports, told me that Rasputine did ring up Tsarskoe Selo on occasions, but spoke to his private friends there, while his listeners believed him to be talking with some member of the Imperial Family.

Alexandra Feodorovna's most intimate friend, Mme. Vyrouboff, was a staunch believer in Rasputine. After disasters in her married life she turned to religion. She had met him before, and now he found the right note with her, and she became his strong adherent. She was firmly convinced that Rasputine was the one person to give peace of mind to the Empress, whom she idolised, and so she became the willing and ever-ready link between Alexandra Feodorovna and the healer. She carried messages from both sides and would always fan the flame of the Empress's faith when it seemed to be waning. It was generally at her house that the Empress saw Rasputine. He very seldom came actually to the Palace. I lived in the Alexander Palace from 1913 to 1917, my room being connected by a corridor with the apartments of the Imperial

[1] During the war St. Petersburg was renamed Petrograd.

children. I never met Rasputine during all the time that I was constantly in the company of the Grand Duchesses. M. Gilliard, who also lived there for several years, never saw him either.

Neither the Empress nor her children ever spoke of Rasputine to those whom they knew to be disbelievers. Contrary to general opinion, the majority of the Empress's household were all among that number. The Empress was always invariably kind in her manner to those who, like Countess Hendrikoff and myself, did not share her beliefs. It did not influence her conduct towards us in the least ; it was only a subject she thought we did not understand, and she never tried to force her opinions on us. Ania Vyrouboff was the only one in the Empress's *entourage* who shared them. This, naturally, strengthened her position with the Empress, for who else could be her messenger ? Rasputine, moreover, was always ready to point out Mme. Vyrouboff's devotion to the Empress, who was grateful to her friend for risking the world's censure by going to the persecuted " Saint " to bring her his sustaining messages.

Alexandra Feodorovna spoke of herself as a " great worrier," and this was true, but when her anxieties gained the upper hand, Rasputine's pious outpourings and her faith in his prayers and prophecies gave her confidence. The Emperor found a certain peace of mind in the hopeful assurances that in the end all would go well, and was glad to see the comfort the Empress derived from her trust in Rasputine's healing powers. Believing as she did in his heaven-sent powers of divination, the Empress passed on to the Emperor Rasputine's casual judgments of people. She also quoted everything he said about the needs of his own peasant class, to which he always remained true. It must be said that, in such things, his opinions were those of a very shrewd peasant and often quite sound. But they did not seem to have much effect on the Emperor, who generally passed them over, or agreed in some small,

unimportant thing so as not to hurt his wife's feelings by refusing what had become *her* request. In general politics Rasputine never had any influence.

Rasputine was certainly too careful to start any political conversations himself. He believed that his pilgrimages had made him an authority on Church matters, and he seems to have spoken on ecclesiastical affairs to the Empress, who listened to the authority of the " Saint " ; but even in this, the Emperor does not seem entirely to have adopted her point of view.

As it was, Rasputine was artificially made into a power by the people who came to him in search of material advantages. These visits created in the public an ever-increasing idea of his importance. If a Cabinet Minister was said to have called on a man like Rasputine, as some are supposed to have done, even if it were only out of curiosity, Rasputine's position became stronger. The public did not believe in a personal or unofficial motive for such a visit. They imagined that Rasputine really had an influence on affairs of State.

At the beginning of the war, when the Cesarevitch was in good health and the Empress was wholly engrossed in her charities, she saw Rasputine very seldom. Mme. Dehn writes in her book that she was even commissioned by the Empress to suggest to Rasputine that he should return to his native village. This his female followers would not allow, and he did not carry out the Empress's wish.

Mme. Vyrouboff's railway accident, followed by the serious illness of the Cesarevitch in December 1915, again brought him to the fore. In that year Mme. Vyrouboff and Mme. Dehn went with Rasputine on a pilgrimage to the shrine of a newly-canonised saint at Tobolsk. They did this at the Empress's request, as she had made a vow to go on that pilgrimage herself, or to send a substitute. On the way, both ladies visited the village where Rasputine's family lived.

Rasputine's wife received them, and they were much impressed by everything they saw. Their account of the visit strengthened, if possible, the Empress's disbelief in all stories reflecting on the object of their veneration. The testimony of these two ladies did not carry weight with anyone but the Empress. Mme. Dehn, as the Empress's friend, was naturally shown only the spiritual side of Rasputine's character. Mme. Vyrouboff knew him better, but his influence over her was so strong that she was not likely to look below the surface. To sum up the question: Rasputine was not the political power pulling the strings of a political game in which Ministers were his pawns; nor the sectary and the dissolute "monk" that he was sometimes, mostly in novels, described as being. But he certainly was not anything like the saint that the Empress imagined him to be. Had he remained in his native village, he would perhaps have kept his reputation of a pious man "with weaknesses." His fellow-villagers would have condoned his sins. He had great faith, and knew how to kindle it in others. He was really indifferent about money. He honestly believed in himself, so Father Vassilieff, the Emperor's confessor, told me. Rasputine thought it right that people should ask for his prayers. His success in St. Petersburg was his undoing; temptations were put in his way to which his weaker side surrendered. He revered his Tsar, peasant-fashion, but, through his presumed political influence on the Empress, he helped to bring about the sovereign's unpopularity.

Contrary to the general impression, Rasputine did not wholly engross the Empress's thoughts. He was but one of the many pages that formed the book of her life. When she wanted a fresh stimulus to her faith, when her son was ill and the doctors' help unavailing, then she opened the page of Rasputine.

Legends of Rasputine sprang up outside the Palace and grew and spread far beyond Russia, where a grossly

distorted version of Rasputine's personality and the part played by him was generally accepted. Nothing is so hard to kill as a legend, but, perhaps, in time, the truth will be realised, and the whole pitiful drama understood.

Rasputine never had any official position in the Palace. He was never "lampadary," a non-existent post, nor did he ever get any pecuniary assistance from either the Emperor or the Empress. Had he ever hinted at help of this kind, his power with them would have gone, for they had the greatest contempt for mercenary motives. He died in the same position with regard to money as he had lived.

CHAPTER XVI

THE EMPRESS AND HER FAMILY

THE Emperor Nicholas and the Empress Alexandra Feodorovna were everything to each other, and their devotion lasted all their lives. Their natures were very different, but they had grown into harmony with each other till they had reached that perfection of understanding in which the tastes and habits of the one are a development and continuation of those of the other. The Empress had the stronger character, and in matters concerning the Household or the children's education, which the Emperor left in her hands, her wishes were law. If anyone referred such questions to the Emperor, he always said "It is as Her Majesty desires." He believed in her intuitive good sense and depended on her judgment. This trust in her opinion made the Empress more self-reliant than she had been in her youth. Her opinion once given, she stuck to it, as she did not like to bother the Emperor with changes of mind; but except in matters that were her regular province, she always quoted him as the lawgiving authority. She tactfully avoided questions on which she knew he had definite prejudices, taking it as unalterable that "the Emperor dislikes such and such a thing," and so avoiding direct opposition to him. She was always ready with a welcoming smile whenever he came into the room. She loved him passionately, even fanatically, and had boundless admiration for his wonderful gentleness, self-denial, patience and sense of duty. She had adopted a semi-

The Cesarevitch in Cossack uniform, Livadia, 1912.

The Imperial Family in 1913.

religious reverence for his rank, and though she was so modest about her own position, anything that seemed like the slightest disrespect to him made her flare up with indignation. The due respect she demanded for herself was *for his sake*—as the consort of the anointed Emperor. She would have preferred to be on more familiar terms with people, but she felt that she owed it to the Emperor to endure restraint and ceremonial that were really distasteful to her. At the same time, the Empress Alexandra Feodorovna was full of true dignity, and on official occasions could be more impressive than Nicholas II, who had wonderful simplicity and an almost homely manner, inherited from his mother, the Empress Marie.

Perhaps it was the Empress's German blood that made her so devoted to her father, brother and husband. Her father and brother, stronger characters than Nicholas II, dominated her. The Emperor, chivalrous and gentle, full of pity for her in her agony over their boy, was, where his home was concerned, under the Empress's influence. She was the centre of the life of her husband and children. All her thoughts were for them, and they looked to her for sympathy in all their doings. She was an ideal wife and an ideal mother. She shared her children's joys and sorrows, and entered into all their games and interests with real enthusiasm. She nursed all her children herself, and the baby's cradle used always to stand in her boudoir in the day-time. When she had to give up nursing the little Grand Duchess Anastasia, she said in a letter to Princess Louis of Battenberg, " It is very hard,—she will be given over to the nurses, a moment that always makes me melancholy, as now she is always in my room or next door."

From an early age the children came down to luncheon with their parents, even if there were guests present in addition to the members of the Household. While they were still babies, their table manners were very good and

they talked quite easily to strangers. They changed into romping clothes for the afternoon, but appeared again at tea time in their best frocks with their toys. Later the toys were replaced by needlework, for the Empress would never allow them to sit about idle. They were perfectly at ease with their parents, looking upon them, not only as parents, but as delightful companions. When they grew up, they laughed and joked with them, the Empress joining in when the Emperor teased his daughters.

The girls were all four remarkably healthy, though they had the usual children's complaints—croup, measles and chicken-pox. Anastasia had diphtheria also, and Olga and Tatiana typhoid. Their mother nursed them through all these illnesses, isolating herself with the sick child, and sitting up for whole nights to soothe and comfort the restless little patient. They had, of course, a staff of nurses; an English head-nurse in charge, with Russians under her, while the Cesarevitch had a Russian head-nurse of his own.

The Empress's favourite child, the one on whom all her thoughts were centred, was her boy. His illness was the tragedy of her happy home life. She could never feel for an hour that he was safe. The little accidents that are bound to happen to a lively child were grave dangers in his case. Just because a fall was so serious to him he seemed always to be falling. When he hurt himself before any public function, the real reason was never given for his non-appearance. It was said that he had a cold or a sprained ankle. All he suffered in the course of his short life can scarcely be believed. It did not embitter him. It only seemed to give him a pity, unusual in a child, for the suffering of other people. He was a pretty child, tall for his age, with regular features, splendid dark blue eyes with a spark of mischief in them, brown hair, and an upright figure. His frequent illnesses made him rather backward at his lessons, but he was very clever, with a

good memory, and when he was well he worked hard to make up for lost time.

He was full of spirits and had quick powers of observation, a generous nature and very strong will. He had chosen as a motto the words of Peter the Great that he had found for himself in a book: "Prayer to God and service to the Tsar will not be lost (*i.e.* in vain)."

He knew the meaning of gratitude, a rare trait in the great, who are often too much inclined to take everything without question. I gave him English lessons after the Revolution, and it was pretty to see him when a lesson was over, getting up ceremoniously, though he might have seen me several times before on that day, and would see me again, giving me his hand, with an exact imitation of the Emperor's manner, and thanking me with his own particularly sweet smile: "It is really nice of you, you know." He felt he was under an obligation to me, as I was not one of his regular teachers. He always tried to show me small attentions, and chose little presents for me from among his own things—he could not buy anything, as he was a prisoner. He was the most conscientious child I ever knew, and always tried to know his lesson well, "as a return for your trouble."

Alexei Nicolaevitch was not impressed by his own importance, and his simple courteous manner was like his father's. He knew and felt that he was the Cesarevitch, and from babyhood mechanically took his place in front of his elder sisters. But he took no pride in the position that he knew was his due, and, after the Revolution, gave it up quite quietly, without a word. His chief friend was the son of Dr. Derevenko, and as a small child he played with the sons of his sailor servant, whose name also, curiously enough, was Derevenko.

All the children adored their mother, but her constant care of him made a particular bond of love between mother and son. When the Emperor left for General

Headquarters in 1915, Alexei Nicolaevitch felt he was, as he once said to me, "the man in the house," and it was delightful to see the grown-up way in which he would look after the Empress when they went to church or to some function together. He would help her to rise, or would unobtrusively push a chair towards her, as the Emperor might have done.

From the very first, the Empress looked after her children's education herself. She gave them their first spelling lessons, and taught them their prayers, going up each evening to pray with them—a custom which she kept up to the end with Alexei Nicolaevitch. As the children grew older, they had of course their own teachers. The Cesarevitch had an excellent tutor in M. P. Gilliard, a Swiss, who was helped after 1915 by an English colleague, Mr. Sydney C. Gibbes.

For a long time the Empress did not want her daughters to have a regular governess. She did not like the idea of a stranger coming between herself and her children. But as the girls grew up, it became necessary to have someone to direct their education and go about with them, and the Empress appointed Mlle. Sophie Ivanovna Tioutcheff as their lady-in-waiting and governess. Mlle. Tioutcheff was a Muscovite, a relation of the poet Tioutcheff. The Empress had heard of her from the Grand Duchess Serge and at first liked her very much.

Mlle. Tioutcheff did not stay many years, however, as she and the Empress disagreed on the subject of Rasputine. Mlle. Tioutcheff was deeply distressed at leaving, as she had got to love her charges. She was the unconscious originator of many false legends about the Court. What she said carelessly was twisted and turned into marvellous stories, which did the Empress a great deal of harm.

After her departure, the Grand Duchesses had no one especially attached to them. Mlle. Schneider took the

charge of the two youngest, Marie and Anastasia, while the elder ones went about with one or other of the Empress's ladies-in-waiting.

The Empress really brought up her daughters herself, and her work was well done. It is not possible to imagine more charming, pure and high-minded girls. She could exercise her authority when necessary, but not in such a way as to interfere with the perfect confidence that existed between mother and daughters. She understood the high spirits of youth, and never put a check on laughter or wild pranks. She liked, too, to be present at their lessons, and to discuss with their teachers the line their studies should follow.

The girls were all very good-looking. The eldest, the Grand Duchess Olga Nicolaevna, was fair and tall, with smiling blue eyes, a somewhat short nose, which she called "my humble snub," and lovely teeth. She had a remarkably graceful figure and was a beautiful rider and dancer. She was the cleverest of the sisters, and was very musical, having, her teachers said, an "absolutely correct ear." She could play by ear anything she had heard, and could transpose complicated pieces of music, play the most difficult accompaniments at sight, and her touch on the piano was delightful. She sang prettily in a mezzo-soprano. She was lazy at practising, but when the spirit moved her she would play by the hour.

Olga Nicolaevna was very straightforward, sometimes too outspoken, but always sincere. She had great charm, and could be the merriest of the merry. When she was a schoolgirl, her unfortunate teachers had every possible practical joke played on them by her. When she grew up, she was always ready for any amusement. She was generous, and an appeal to her met with immediate response. "Oh, one must help poor so-and-so. I must do it somehow," she would say. Her more careful sister, Tatiana, would suggest practical measures, would note

names and details, and come back to the subject later out of a sense of duty.

Olga Nicolaevna was devoted to her father. The horror of the Revolution told on her more keenly than on any of the others. She changed completely, and all her bright spirits disappeared.

Tatiana Nicolaevna was to my mind prettier than her sisters. She was taller even than the Empress, but she was so slight and well-proportioned that her great height was not remarkable. She had fine, regular features, recalling pictures of ancestresses who had been famous beauties. She had dark hair, a rather pale complexion, and wide-apart, light-brown eyes, that gave her a poetic far-away look, not quite in keeping with her character. This was a mixture of exactness, thoroughness and perseverance, with leanings towards poetic and abstract ideas. She was closest in sympathy to her mother, and was the definite favourite of both her parents. She was completely unselfish, always ready to give up her own plans to go for a walk with her father, to read to her mother, to do anything that was wanted. It was Tatiana Nicolaevna who took care of the little ones, and who was a constant help to the Household, always willing to help them in arranging that their official duties should not clash with their private engagements. She had the Empress's practical mind and love of detail. She planned and arranged everything in the " Children's quarters " as it was called. She had a less strong character than Olga Nicolaevna, whose lead she would always follow, but she could make up her mind in an emergency quicker than her elder sister, and never lost her head.

When her brother was ill, Tatiana Nicolaevna could take her mother's place, following the doctor's directions and playing with the sick boy for hours. Out of a sense of duty, she undertook more than her share of public appearances. She was shy, like all her sisters, but her

natural friendliness made her *want* to say pleasant things to people. She became much better known than her cleverer elder sister, as she took more trouble about the people she met.

Tatiana Nicolaevna loved dress. Any frock, no matter how old, looked well on her. She knew how to put on her clothes, was admired and liked admiration. She was sociable, and friends would have been welcome, but no young girls were ever asked to the Palace. The Empress thought that the four sisters should be able to entertain one another. They were close friends when they outgrew the squabbles of childhood. The two elder shared one bedroom, the two younger another, while their schoolrooms and dining-room were in common. The little Cesarevitch had his own rooms, in which M. Gilliard ruled.

Marie Nicolaevna was like Olga Nicolaevna in colouring and features, but all on a more vivid scale. She had the same charming smile, the same shape of face, but her eyes, "Marie's saucers," as they were called by her cousins, were magnificent, and of a deep dark blue. Her hair had golden lights in it, and when it was cut after her illness in 1917, it curled naturally over her head. Marie Nicolaevna, alone of the sisters, had a decided talent for drawing, and sketched quite well, always with her left hand. "Mashka," as her sisters called her, was ruled entirely by her youngest sister, Anastasia Nicolaevna, nicknamed by her mother "the imp."

Perhaps Anastasia Nicolaevna would have grown up the prettiest of the sisters. Her features were regular and finely cut. She had fair hair, fine eyes, with impish laughter in their depths, and dark eyebrows that nearly met. These combined to make the youngest Grand Duchess quite unlike any of her sisters. She had a type of her own and was more like her mother's than her father's family. She was rather short even at seventeen,

and was, then decidedly fat, but it was the fatness of youth. She would have outgrown it, as had her sister Marie.

Anastasia Nicolaevna was the originator of all mischief, and was as witty and amusing as she was lazy at her lessons. She was quick and observant, with a keen sense of humour, and was the only one of the sisters who never knew the meaning of shyness. Even as a baby she had entertained grave old men, who were her neighbours at table, with her astonishing remarks.

All the Grand Duchesses were very Russian in their outlook and ideas. Their only experience of foreign countries had been in short visits to Darmstadt, and once to England, and they preferred life in their own country to anything else. They always spoke Russian among themselves and to the Emperor, English to their mother, and French to M. Gilliard. The elder girls had a smattering of German, but spoke it with difficulty ; the younger ones and the Cesarevitch did not know it at all.

The Grand Duchesses' best and most intimate friend was their young aunt, the Grand Duchess Olga Alexandrovna. They looked on her as an elder sister, and she was their ideal in everything. She had a delightful and cheerful personality, and was a great favourite with her sister-in-law, the Empress, and came constantly to Tsarskoe Selo before the war. She had young people's parties for her nieces nearly every Sunday afternoon in her town house, at which they all enjoyed themselves immensely. No elders were invited to these parties except the Grand Duchess's cousin, the Duchess Marie Leuchtenberg (*née* Countess Grabbé), who brought her own girls and acted as chaperone to all the others. These Sunday afternoons were great events in the girls' lives.

The two elder girls were to have made their official appearance in St. Petersburg society in 1914, when the Empress had meant to resume the giving of Court balls in their honour. They were always present at the rare

functions given at Court after 1915. They looked very attractive, the one fair and the other dark. The Empress dressed her daughters well. Sometimes all four were dressed alike, sometimes the two elder wore one colour, the two younger another. Though their outward surroundings had, naturally, to be luxurious, their private lives and tastes were very simple, simpler indeed in many ways than the lives led by many Russian girls of less position. The Empress would not allow them to be pampered. They dressed themselves, their maids only arranging their clothes. According to the tradition of Russian Court nurseries, dating from the time of Catherine II, when Rousseau's ideas on education had been followed, they slept on hard camp beds. They went on wearing their clothes until they were worn out, or they had outgrown them, when the dresses of the elder girls were altered for the younger ones. The Empress did not like squandering money, though she was so lavish in charity. The Grand Duchesses had large fortunes of their own, but they were each given, as pocket money, only two pounds a month, with which to buy their note-paper, scent, small presents, etc. Their dress bills were of course paid for them. In this way they learned to think before spending. Every present they gave was the result of some personal sacrifice. They had to go without something for themselves before they could buy anything for their parents, sisters and ladies-in-waiting, "out of their own pocket." In this way their mother hoped to make them realise the value of money, a thing that princes find it hard to understand. But etiquette prevented their going into any shops but those of the little stationers at Tsarskoe Selo and Yalta, and they never had any clear idea of the value and price of things.

Their rank meant very little to them, and they felt ill at ease when they were treated ceremoniously. Once at a committee I had to address "my president," the Grand

Duchess Tatiana, officially, and naturally began, "May it please Your Imperial Highness." She looked at me with astonishment, and when I sat down again beside her I was rewarded by a violent kick under the table and a whispered "Are you crazy to speak to me like that?" In common with all the Household, I called the Emperor's daughters, in the Russian fashion, by their names and patronymic, and she thought it quite absurdly formal for me to have given her her full title! I had to appeal to the Empress to persuade her that on official occasions it was really necessary.

The Grand Duchesses very seldom saw other children. Sometimes their cousins, the children of the Grand Duchess Xenia, came to see them. There was an occasional tea party at Mme. Vyrouboff's or a Sunday afternoon party at "Aunt Olga's." They were used to a quiet life, and never grumbled, or seemed bored with one another's society. They took the greatest interest in the Household from the highest to the lowest, and were considerate in little ways, often doing things for themselves so as to enable their maids to go out. They knew the names and family histories of the officers and men of the yacht and of the Cossacks of the escort, and talked to them freely. I was a great deal with the two elder Grand Duchesses, who had no lady-in-waiting of their own, and often went about with them. They were deeply interested in everything I did, and all four invariably came to help me to dress for a ball, somewhat to the consternation of my maid, who felt she could not do justice to my toilette with four lively Grand Duchesses in the room, each giving her own directions. On one occasion they thought my dress needed a *parure* of rubies to complete it. I said I had none, and that my pearls would have to do. Tatiana Nicolaevna rushed off, and appeared with some brooches of hers which she wanted me to wear. I naturally refused, to her great astonishment.

"We sisters *always* borrow from each other," she said, "when we think the jewels of the one will suit the dress of the other."

No appeal to them for help was ever put on one side. They would ask over and over again if this or that person had been helped, and what had been done. When Olga Nicolaevna, at the age of twenty, began to have some of her money in her own hands, the first thing she did was to ask her mother to allow her to pay for a crippled child to be treated in a sanatorium. On her drives she had often seen this child hobbling about on crutches, and had heard that the parents were poor and could not afford a long and costly treatment. She had at once begun to put aside her small monthly allowance to go towards paying for the treatment.

Family life at the Tsarskoe Palace had a special atmosphere of its own. The children were closely united, and, in spite of the difference in their characters, understood one another well. They could never have been happy apart. It would have been an unheard-of thing for one of the Grand Duchesses to go anywhere even for a day without her sisters. She would not have enjoyed it at all.

Of course, with such differences in character there were bound also to be differences in points of view, leading to hot discussions. Marie Nicolaevna was obstinate; Olga Nicolaevna was hot-tempered and would sometimes turn suddenly cross when she was offended. But they never quarrelled or wrangled, and with their parents they were on terms of fond familiarity and respect that were delightful to see.

It was not possible to avoid wondering what would happen in so united a family when the question of marriage arose. The Emperor and Empress did not want their daughters to make *mariages de convenance*. They wanted them to marry for love, as they themselves had done. On the other hand, the Empress disliked the idea

of marriage with commoners. She thought that it tended to weaken the prestige of the Imperial Family, and that the Emperor's daughters had a duty towards their father's position. She did not scheme for her daughters, nor would she have forced their inclinations. There were discussions of a Roumanian marriage for the Grand Duchess Olga Nicolaevna, which the families and Ministers of both countries would have liked. But the young Grand Duchess was not attracted by the suggested bridegroom, and told her mother so. In one or two other cases Olga Nicolaevna was equally firm. The Empress thought a loveless marriage impossible, and was quite ready for her daughters to wait till the right men came to claim them.

CHAPTER XVII

THE EMPRESS AT HOME—HER FRIENDS

THE Empress Alexandra Feodorovna's life was made up of long and busy days. Most of her afternoons were spent in giving audiences, in going to schools, or seeing people about her various charities. Her receptions took up a great deal of time, as she felt less shy when she saw each person separately. She was often quite worn out by the evening, and to very little effect, so far as her personal popularity was concerned. There was no one to arrange her work for her, to choose the essential things, those which the public at large would appreciate, and to omit those which were less important. The Empress wore herself out in doing kind things in individual cases, in which she could have the satisfaction of knowing the pleasure she gave; but these things were neither known to nor appreciated by the public at large.

She always felt in a hurry, which is not to be wondered at, considering the great place her children filled in her life, and the amount of work she got through. She often transacted her correspondence, both private and business, in bed; for she got up late in the morning by doctor's orders, and wrote her letters during long wakeful hours at night. Whenever she sat with her family she had some piece of fancy work in her hand—a habit acquired in childhood under the influence of Queen Victoria. She was a great reader. Her taste lay towards serious books, though she enjoyed modern English novels and read them with her daughters as they grew up. The Empress

had never been a sportswoman, and her sciatica prevented her from playing any games after her marriage. She loved riding, and often rode with the Emperor in early years, and even rode at the head of her Lancers at their jubilee review in 1903. But she had to give up all forms of exercise shortly after the Cesarevitch's birth. After 1905, when she had more time, Alexandra Feodorovna took up her music again. She played duets with Professor Kuendinger, who came to her every week for some hours, and she began to take singing lessons with Mme. N. A. Iretskaya of the Conservatoire. The Empress had a fine contralto voice, and looked forward to the time when she would be able to sing with her daughters. She sometimes invited other music-lovers to sing duets with her:—Baroness Mary Stackelberg (*née* Kaulbars), Ania and Alia Taneeff, Countess Emma Freedericsz and Mesdames X— and X—, two well-known singers from the Opera. Alexandra Feodorovna was far too timid to sing in public, and these few ladies were the only people who heard her. Princess Sonia Orbeliani often arranged little musical parties to which the Empress came. Singers and pianists were invited, and a few of the Princess's personal friends made up the audience. Princess Orbeliani hoped this might lead to other parties of the same sort which the Empress could have given herself. However, the Empress's heart trouble soon obliged her to give up her music also, which was a very real regret to her.

The Empress's personal tastes were all simple, and in spite of the outward luxury and all the money spent by the Court, the Imperial Family had in reality fewer actual comforts than many private people. They had to submit to old-fashioned rules and regulations, which the Empress tried in vain to break through. Even an autocrat cannot alter established routine, and she could change little even in her own household, except the dresses of her maids. For tea at the Palace buns were served of the same kind

as had been given to the Empress Catherine; scores of servants loitered about, when a quarter of the number could have done the work, had it been systematically arranged; and very often the Empress would do a thing herself rather than send for the special servant whose duty it was to do that special thing. There were old-world traditions that hampered her own movements. The Empress would have shocked the whole nation if she had ever dared to enter a shop in St. Petersburg (Yalta or Tsarskoe Selo were considered rural residences and shopping was possible). When she began to go to church alone with her daughters, people were astonished—and dubious. It did not seem to be quite the thing for her to do! The Empress could not drive alone in an open carriage (*droshky*) except at Peterhof, where the Emperor's great-grandmother had occasionally driven a phaeton in the first quarter of the nineteenth century, and a precedent having been established, the Empress could drive alone in a victoria at Peterhof without being criticised! All these rules were irksome to the Empress, but when she disregarded them comment was always excited.

Alexandra Feodorovna was economical and knew the value of money. She dressed well but not extravagantly. She chose the clothes that suited her type, and hated the extremes of fashion. She looked magnificent in full dress and was always beautiful. She never impoverished the Treasury by having costly jewels bought for herself. She had many fine jewels that were family heirlooms (most of the Crown jewels were still worn by the Dowager-Empress); but as the big tiaras she wore on State occasions were the Crown jewels put aside for the wife of the Cesarevitch, she used laughingly to say that, when Alexei Nicolaevitch married, she would have to hand them over and do what she could for herself. The Emperor, of course, gave his wife many jewels, but they were things that were chosen in accordance with her own taste and

not on account of their value, so that she had many sets of her favourite stones, amethysts and aquamarines. She thriftily wore her gala dresses for years, and during the war made it a point not to get a single new dress for herself or for her daughters, using the whole of her dress allowance, and theirs, for charity. Blue and mauve were her favourite colours, and she loved the long sweeping draperies of no particular shape in which she looked so well.

When the Empress found that she could not strike the right note with St. Petersburg society, she drew still more into herself. From the very beginning, she had thought it her duty to bring more serious interests into the lives of society women. She tried to start a working guild, which continued to exist till 1917, but it was looked upon as "an educational measure," one of the conditions being that the work had to be done by the member with her own hands. All her schemes were scoffed at. She could never carry out the reforms she thought necessary in the "Patriotic schools." Changes in the lists of invitations to Court balls which were made at the beginning of the reign were ascribed to her personally and created bitterness. Criticisms of *outré* fashions that she was said to have made were repeated and resented by those concerned. Alexandra Feodorovna felt that everything she did was criticised adversely by certain sections. Misled by the cheering that welcomed her on public appearances, she believed herself popular with the country at large, and this consoled her for her unpopularity in society. She disliked publicity, and by her special wish her charities and kindnesses were never spoken of outside a small circle. But family affection was the most important thing to her, and in this respect the Empress's life was full and happy. She was devoted to the Emperor's two sisters, the Grand Duchesses Xenia and Olga. She took interest in the lives of all her Household, from the *Grande maîtresse* down to the last little maid, often

The Empress and the Cesarevitch, 1913.

The Emperor and Empress on the *Standart*, 1912.

helping the humble ones and their families in ways that no one knew. She was democratic in the real Christian sense, and made no distinction of class. She would go to see a sick maid as readily as one of her ladies-in-waiting. During the terrible time of her captivity at Tobolsk she remembered that her faithful maid, Madeleine Zanotti, had been with her for twenty-five years. She contrived to have a little present made, and begged the commander to send it to her on that anniversary. Though she was naturally hot-tempered, the Empress seldom gave way to irritation. When greatly provoked, she would flare up, but she would be much distressed at her hastiness, and would worry for days about a small thing, which had probably been forgotten by the person who had incurred her displeasure. The forgiveness which, in accordance with the Russian custom, she begged of those round her before going to confession was really asked for from the heart.

The Empress found it inadvisable on principle to make friends of her ladies-in-waiting, as she thought it might cause jealousy if she showed more sympathy to one than she did to the others. She was kind and attentive to all. She gave us beautiful presents and she looked after us, personally, when we were ill, but there was a certain barrier that was never passed. Only when their official position had ended—as, for instance, when the Princess Bariatinsky left her post as lady-in-waiting or when Sonia Orbeliani became an invalid—did she show her ladies the personal friendship she felt for them.

But if her ladies were not allowed the privilege of full intimacy during their time of service, she was always goodness itself to them, and all the Household came to the Empress in any trouble or difficulty. I shall never forget the kindness the Empress showed me at the time of my mother's death, when I shared the Imperial Family's imprisonment at Tsarskoe Selo. It was a time of grave danger for the Emperor, danger so great that I felt I could not

leave and go to my mother who was seriously ill at Kazan ; as I had been told that, if I did, I should not be allowed to return. The Empress sympathised with my anxieties as if they had been her own. Though she had never asked a single favour for herself during all the time of her detention, she now begged the revolutionary commander of the Palace as a personal favour to bring her the telegram about my mother at whatever hour it might come, as she wanted to prepare me herself for the news she feared it might hold. The telegram came on the night of the Empress's birthday, and it was she who broke the news of her death to me next morning with a tenderness and love that no words can describe.

Having few friends in society, Alexandra Feodorovna clung all the more to those she found. Motherliness lay at the root of her character, and she was always particularly attracted by people she could help and guide. In her youth in Germany and in her early years in Russia she had two friends on whom she could lean in her turn ; these were women slightly older than herself—Countess Julie Rantzau and Princess Marie Bariatinsky. It was to the latter she wrote (November 23rd, 1905) :

> I must have a person to myself, if I want to be my *real* self. I am not made to shine before an assembly—I have not got the easy nor the witty talk one needs for that. I like the *internal being*, and that attracts me with great force. As you know, I am of the preacher type. I want to help others in life, to help them to fight their battles and bear their crosses. . . . What can I tell you in a letter ? Things are more than serious and intricate, and all one's hope and trust must be placed in God. Serious times are yet ahead, and rough ones—One's heart is so full. . . .

The Empress had a lofty ideal. She gave herself completely to those who were her friends. Difference of rank did not exist. She was ready to do literally anything for her friends ; their interests became her own, and their sorrows were hers. She would take up things and people

with violent enthusiasm. The first enthusiasm might wane with time, but her friendships were lasting, even though she saw the objects of them as seldom as she did the friends of her youth, Frau Bracht (Toni Becker) and "Juju" Rantzau, whose death she mourned in 1901, or her old governess, Miss Jackson. She wrote about Countess Rantzau to Princess M. Bariatinsky on February 24th, 1901:

She was a rare flower, too delicate for this world, but rejoicing others with her fragrance and cheering them on the way. She understood the difficulties of this world, and the different temptations, and always encouraged one in the right, and helped one to fight one's weaknesses. It came so naturally to speak about one's faith to her, that now I feel her loss greatly. Only her dear writings have remained to me. [The Empress and the Countess wrote a kind of diary to each other, which they exchanged every week.] I pray to God to make me as worthy, as she was, of a new and more perfectly happy life in yonder world.

Another time, in a letter to the same person, she says:

Dearest Mary,—I send you my most loving thanks for your dear letter from the frontier—it was great happiness hearing from you. I miss you and our cosy chats very much indeed, and since you left I have again had such a loss—it is very hard, but I cannot but be grateful, that God took her to Him and that her long and weary sufferings have come to an end. But to all that knew her it is a great loss, but she was well fit for Heaven—a pure, ideal Christian. Only an hour before the fatal news, I received her last letter, so you can imagine what a shock it was. But I must not write to you about sad things, though my heart is full of sorrow—and I am awfully anxious about Gretchen Fabrice—I hope the journey was not too tiring. . . .

(St. Petersburg, January 29th, 1901.)

The Princess Marie Bariatinsky, to whom these letters were written, had been appointed the Empress's lady-in-waiting in November 1896, and had to resign her post in 1898 to be with her old parents, as her father's health was failing. She greatly endeared herself to the Empress, and became one of her few friends after she gave up her official

position. Princess Marie Bariatinsky had a fine and sensitive nature and great charm of manner. Her tact and worldly *savoir-faire* made her a great help to the Empress during her first years in Russia. When Princess Bariatinsky settled permanently in Rome with her parents, the Empress saw her only at rare intervals, but whenever she came to Russia, Alexandra Feodorovna always had her friend with her for several weeks as a guest. She at first missed her companionship greatly: "I long for you," she wrote to her, shortly after her friend had left, and in another letter to her said: "To have such a true and devoted friend is indeed a gift of God and I thank Him for it daily" (December 28th, 1898).

The same feeling is echoed in another letter dated August 9th, 1912:

> Once more let me tell you *how very happy* I was to have seen you again, dear, after 5 long years of separation. It is a joy to see a dear friend so unchanged again, and to feel as though we had never been separated at all, these years. But that is real friendship that remains the same though time and space may sever one. A *warm* heart is a treat, and I always deeply, gratefully, value it.

In another earlier letter she says:

> Separation makes no difference—friends remain the same, don't they, dear? And you will have a lot to tell me about your life and interests, and I shall have my little ones to show you. Life brings us sorrows and trials without end, but all is for the best, and God gives one strength to bear one's heavy cross,[1] and go on fighting. . . .

The simple, affectionate terms between the Empress and her friends are seen in these letters and in the following, which also show the interest she took in all those that belonged to them. She wrote to Princess Bariatinsky on December 28th, 1898, from Tsarskoe Selo:

> Don't be anxious about me, I tell you openly all, so that you need not worry. I am careful, and rest all day and miss your

[1] The allusion is to the Cesarevitch's health.

dear company more than I can say. For your precious letter from the frontier a hearty kiss and many thanks. Your words of tender love did me much good.

And to the same (Tsarskoe Selo, May 8th, 1901):

Thank God, that your dear father is a wee bit better. I can so well imagine your feelings and know well the anxiety you are going through. Only that he should not suffer. God give you all strength and comfort. If I could have a wee word from time to time with news of him, I should be most grateful. The weather is glorious, so warm and nice. I sit working on the balcony. Anemones and blue flowers are out and the buds on the bushes are quite big, and the birds sing so sweetly. But enough for to-day. Good-bye, and God bless you. Tenderest love from your devoted friend,

ALEXANDRA.

Protective feeling was at the bottom of the Empress's friendship for Sonia Orbeliani, another of her ladies. She was a Georgian, the daughter of Prince John Orbeliani and Princess M. D. Sviatopolk-Mirsky. She was only 23 when she came to Court in 1898. Princess Orbeliani was very small, fair, with distinctive features, a good sports-woman, clever, amusing, and a very fine musician. She attracted the Empress by her frank, unaffected manners and high spirits, and in her turn formed an intense attachment to Alexandra Feodorovna, which was, of course, increased by all the Empress did for her during her long illness—a form of spinal disease, which made her practically a cripple towards the end. The Empress had great moral influence over her, and it was she who led the doomed woman, who knew what was awaiting her, to the attainment of that wonderful Christian submission with which she not only patiently bore her malady but managed to keep a cheerful spirit and keen interest in life.

For nine long years, whatever her own health was, the Empress never paid her daily visit to her children without going to Sonia's rooms, which adjoined those of the Grand

Duchesses. When Sonia had an acute attack of illness, which happened from time to time, the Empress went to her not only several times a day but often at night when she was very ill: indeed no mother could have been more loving. Special carriages and special appliances were made for Sonia, so that she could share the general life as if she were well, and she followed the Empress everywhere. Alexandra Feodorovna made her feel that she was a privileged person, so afraid was she that she might realise that she had become, instead of the help she had been, only one person more needing the Empress's care.

The Empress's friendship with the Grand Duchesses Militza and Stana, which was at its height during the first years of the century, was more on the basis of intellectual affinity. When the Empress thought that her cousins had become the prey of intriguers, who had prejudiced them against Rasputine, in whom they at first had believed, she turned from them in disappointment and bitterness.

The most intimate friend the Empress made in later years was Anna Alexandrovna Vyrouboff (Ania Taneeff). The Empress's interest in her was first awakened when Ania, as a girl of sixteen, was dangerously ill with typhoid. Her father was the head of the Emperor's private chancellery, and when the Empress heard of his daughter's dangerous illness, she showed the greatest sympathy, and frequently came to see Ania Taneeff, who was not expected to recover. She did so, however, and the romantic young girl conceived a passionate admiration for Alexandra Feodorovna in return for her kindness. There was more frequent intercourse in the next winter, as the Empress had discovered Mlle. Taneeff's musical abilities, and she was often sent for to the Palace to play accompaniments or sing duets with Her Majesty. She was one of the numerous maids-of-honour, but never held the post of lady-in-waiting. Only once, in 1905, when there had been a suggestion that the maids-of-honour might occasionally come into waiting for

a longer period, she was one of the three who were selected. The others were Mlle. Sophie Raievsky (now Princess Gagarine) and myself. This was, of course, before my appointment as lady-in-waiting. Little by little a great friendship grew up between the Empress and Ania. They had many tastes in common; Mlle. Taneeff was also of a deeply religious nature, and the Empress had a motherly feeling towards the young girl, whose open adoration touched her greatly. She became a constant visitor at the Palace and was even invited to join the Imperial Family in their cruises on the yacht, which was an exceptional favour, as no one was ever invited on these trips except a few members of the Household.

From the outset Ania complained that the Court people were not always amiable towards her, and this roused the Empress's protective feeling. This, in fact, always was the case, for Mme. Vyrouboff had few friends at Court, except the family of Count Freedericsz, the *ministre de la cour*, and her position was difficult. Alexandra Feodorovna was mentally far superior to Ania, whom she regarded as a child whose mind she had to prepare for the struggle of life. Ania poured out all her heart to the Empress. At first they were the griefs of girlhood, but ere long she had real sorrows to confide, for her unhappy marriage with Lieutenant Vyrouboff was soon dissolved. After this the Empress devoted even more time to her childless and lonely young friend, and tried to bring new interests into her life. By this time Ania had made the acquaintance of Rasputine. Piety and great superstition were united in her nature, and she became a sincere believer, which was another link with the Empress. Ania now centred her whole life on Alexandra Feodorovna. She could show her attentions and give her little presents, in an informal way that was permissible in a friend but not in anyone of the Household. The Empress thought her unpretentious and guileless, and felt happy in having again found a devoted friend, now

that Princess Bariatinsky was away and Sonia Orbeliani could not be all that she had been on account of her health. Mme. Vyrouboff was a handsome woman in the florid style, with small features and fine, child-like eyes. She was tender-hearted and generous to the poor to the point of recklessness, but not clever. She was genuinely devoted to the Empress, and yet, unwittingly, she harmed her in the latter years, for she did not realise how much she was in the public eye as the Empress's best friend, nor that her every word and gesture were watched and adversely commented upon. Her trustfulness often misled her into receiving everyone who came to her on one plea or another, believing that she was serving the Empress by keeping herself in touch with the world outside the precincts of the Court. She was far too inexperienced to distinguish between the people she thus received. She did not introduce them into the Palace, but the fact that she had even casually seen them recoiled on the Empress, for in public opinion the French proverb, *Les amis de nos amis sont nos amis*, is always believed.

The Empress's ill-health and consequent seclusion in the last years brought about the possibility of Mme. Vyrouboff's daily visit to the Palace becoming an institution. The Emperor and the children liked her, and she was treated by all as a member of the family. If by chance one day passed without her seeing the Empress, Ania was in childish despair. Her Majesty laughed at her but was touched. There were occasional clouds when Mme. Vyrouboff became too gushing or exacting ; to her, the Empress filled her life, while for Alexandra Feodorovna the Emperor and her children always came before everything, and she had also many other people who had their share of her solicitude. The Empress and Mme. Vyrouboff had a friend in common, Mme. " Lily " Dehn, *née* Smolsky. Mme. Dehn's husband had been one of the officers of the Imperial yachts, and the Empress had stood sponsor to

their small son and taken great interest in the boy and his young mother. When the child was desperately ill Mme. Dehn sent for Rasputine, and ever after believed that his prayers had saved her boy's life at that crisis. This created a bond between the two mothers, and during the war the Empress saw more and more of Mme. Dehn, comforting her in her anxieties for her husband at the front. Mme. Dehn often came to the Empress, but never stayed at the Palace itself. She continued to live in their flat in the officers' barracks of the *équipage de la garde*. Mme. Dehn was a clever, pleasant woman, no intriguer, and never forcing herself into prominence on the strength of the Empress's friendship. During the weeks after the Revolution she offered to stay at the Palace and help the Empress to nurse the sick Grand Duchesses. She had been nursing Mme. Vyrouboff, who was visiting at the Palace and who also developed measles at the time the Revolution broke out. For the three weeks Mme. Dehn remained with the Empress during that terrible time, she showed the Empress the greatest devotion and was a real help to her.

Sickness and suffering were always sure keys to the Empress's heart. She wrote to Marie Bariatinsky, speaking of Countess Hendrikoff's mother, who was a confirmed invalid:

> I thank God that He allows me to be the means of giving her a little comfort and brightness. After all, it is life's greatest consolation to feel that the sorrowing need one, and that is my daily prayer, for years already, that God should just send me the sorrowing, and give me the possibility to be a help to them, through His infinite mercy. . . .

Times without number, often weak and ailing herself, the Empress went from Tsarskoe Selo to St. Petersburg to see the sick woman, and when she was dying, she spent hours at her deathbed, in fulfilment of a promise she had made her. She was herself such a devoted mother that she felt particular sympathy with other mothers' griefs. The

illness or loss of a child made an immediate appeal to her, were it the child of a great lady or that of some humble person. It was with real understanding that she wrote to the friend of her youth, Frau Erhardt, in 1912, when she heard that her only daughter was slowly dying. In all her letters she speaks with the warmest sympathy of sickness and grief. For instance, of Princess Zeneide Youssoupoff's grief over the loss of a promising young son, the Empress writes :

> One's heart bleeds to see poor Zeneide in her terrible sorrow—she looks so wee and frail and lovely, tho' she sees people, and far more than she would like. Even out here they follow her. Lily is again in sorrow. . . . (To the Princess Bariatinsky, March 21st, 1905.)

Young Mme. Balashoff mourning her baby, Princess Galitzine an idolised grandchild, people she knew well, others that she knew but slightly, all were sure of finding warm, spontaneous sympathy in their troubles from Alexandra Feodorovna. If it was only possible, her first impulse was to go to them. When she could not do so, it was in writing that she poured out her warm heart. Her choice flowers, her best loved books were always sent by her to them. I have myself many a time seen her go unobtrusively and simply at Yalta to visit some poor consumptive patient in his home, and talk with a mother's understanding to the youth's mother. During the war many a poor widow and mother would be sent for to the Palace, and be met with those words of human sympathy which came straight from the Empress's heart. Her ladies were often told not to receive such visitors, for Alexandra Feodorovna did not wish official ceremonial to intrude when she wanted her guest to feel that she was but a woman who understood the distress of another. None who saw that side of the Empress ever said that she was stiff and cold.

CHAPTER XVIII

LAST YEARS OF PEACE, 1913–1914

THE year 1913 was the Jubilee of the Romanoff dynasty, when the completion of three hundred years of monarchy was celebrated with great rejoicings. Expressions of fealty reached the Imperial Family from every part of the country. It seemed scarcely possible that the people who hailed the Revolution with enthusiasm four years later could have moved such addresses of loyalty and taken part in such celebrations. In the winter of 1913 the Emperor and Empress spent some weeks in St. Petersburg. The St. Petersburg nobility gave a splendid ball in their honour, to which came all the available members of the Imperial house and hundreds of guests. The two elder Grand Duchesses went with their parents to this ball. They were not yet officially "out" (Olga Nicolaevna was seventeen, Tatiana Nicolaevna not quite sixteen), but the importance of the occasion justified their appearance. The Empress dragged herself with difficulty to all the functions. She had been completely worn out by her son's illness, but she roused herself to appear at the *fêtes*.

At the great ball in the *Salle de la Noblesse* she felt so ill that she could scarcely keep her feet. She underwent tortures from the feeling of faintness that overwhelmed her, before she was able to attract the attention of the Emperor who was talking at the other end of the room. When he came up it was only just in time to lead her away and prevent her from fainting in public.

The Emperor and Empress held a reception at the

Winter Palace, but their stay in town was cut short. The Grand Duchess Tatiana fell ill with typhoid, and had to be taken home to Tsarskoe Selo, where the Empress nursed her back to health, paying for her exertions by long weeks afterwards spent on her sofa.

Jubilee celebrations were held in the summer in Moscow, and the Imperial Family had promised to go to all the various Russian towns associated with the first Romanoffs. The Emperor and Empress and their children left Tsarskoe Selo on May 28th and went first, *via* Moscow, to Vladimir and Bogoliouboff (May 30th), then to Nijni Novgorod, where they embarked on a river boat and sailed up the Volga. After nearly twenty years the Empress had her wish. They went first to Kostroma (June 3rd), where the first Romanoff Tsar had received the offer of the Russian crown from the Boyars. Here all the Imperial Family, except the Dowager-Empress, were awaiting them. As the small flotilla sailed up the river, the Imperial Family in one boat, the suite in another, the banks were crowded with people, and at every village the peasants waded into the stream in their eagerness to see the Tsar's boat, and perhaps to catch a glimpse of him.

The Ipatieff[1] convent at Kostroma was the goal of their journey. It was there that the Tsar Michael had received the deputation of Boyars. People from all the surrounding provinces had assembled, dozens of ikons were presented, loyal speeches were made and answered. It was a triumphal progress. Everyone seemed enthusiastic and full of loyalty. From Kostroma the Imperial Family sailed up the river to Iaroslav, where they left their boat, and went by rail to Pereieslavl and Rostov Veliki. The Empress was quite exhausted, and did not go with the Emperor to these last two towns, but stayed in the train, saving up her strength for Moscow. Here the

[1] By a strange coincidence the house in Ekaterinburg where the last drama took place in 1918 bore the same name as the house where the first Tsar had begun his reign.

The Grand Duchess Elisabeth Feodorovna, 1912.

The Empress's private balcony at Livadia.

festivities were on a grand scale, for the ancient capital was always anxious to out-do St. Petersburg in hospitality.

In the autumn of 1913 the Imperial Family went to Livadia. The old Palace had been pulled down and a beautiful new one had been built on its site. This was in the Italian style, and the Empress had taken the keenest interest in planning it, remembering and reproducing many things that she had seen in Italy, the cloisters of San Marco in Florence being used as a model for the central courtyard, where all assembled after lunch. There were many beautiful antiques in the reception rooms, and ancient Greek marbles, found in excavations in the Crimea, in the gardens. The Empress was specially interested in the gardens, and spent hours driving about in her pony carriage, planning improvements. The scenery was lovely. Livadia was situated half-way up a mountain, with the majestic Ai-Petri as a background, and the rocky beach below. The wide expanse of the Black Sea was to be seen from nearly every one of the Palace windows. The Crimea lies far to the south, and the vegetation is like that of the Riviera. There were wonderful groves of olive trees, cypresses among the rose gardens, and luxuriant southern creepers. The whole Imperial Family loved Livadia. They went there chiefly on account of the health of the Empress and the Cesarevitch, but the beauty of the surroundings and the free life were a delight to them all. The Empress really rested there, lying much on her balcony and avoiding fatigue, joining the family party in the cloistered courtyard after luncheon. Out of lesson hours, the Grand Duchesses bathed, and rode, and played tennis with their father. Nearly all the other members of the Imperial Family had villas dotted along the coast. Balls were given for the young people by the Grand Duchess Peter, by the Grand Duchess George (*née* Princess Marie of Greece), by Princess Bariatinsky (sister-in-law to the Empress's friend), and sometimes by the

officers of the one or two regiments stationed in the Crimea. Dances were also given by the Empress at Livadia, delightfully informal gatherings, to which not more than one hundred and fifty guests, mostly young people, were invited. There were many villas round Yalta, for this was a favourite resort of Russian society in autumn, and at Livadia the Empress's daughters had a glimpse of the life led by young girls of their own age, and enjoyed it to the full. They never had any further opportunities for dancing.

Many excursions were arranged when the Grand Duke of Hesse paid a visit to Livadia in 1912 (May–June). The Empress could not go about much, as motoring tired her, but she took part in an excursion by sea to Novy Sviet during her brother's visit. Novy Sviet was a beautiful place, with celebrated vineyards, which an eccentric old Prince Galitzine had given to the Emperor. Prince Galitzine loved the Crimea and the Tartar people. He had settled down on his immense Crimean property after having spent the best part of his life in Paris, and as he had no son had handed over half his estate to the Emperor. His two modes of life were shown in his costume, a combination between a Tartar merchant's full dress, and that of an old-fashioned Parisian artist, a frock coat, long hair under a high sheepskin hat, and a flowing gaudy tie. He received the Imperial party with semi-Oriental hospitality, with wonderful food, and the choicest wine from his celebrated cellars. There was, however, a certain amount of discomfort, for Novy Sviet was miles away from everything, but perhaps the unconventional things were those that pleased his Imperial guests the most.

After the Grand Duke of Hesse had left, the Imperial Family sailed to the Caucasian coast and paid a flying visit to Gagry. Here a popular *fête* was organised in their honour, but the weather was bad and the Empress had to stay on board.

Though their Majesties seldom gave formal audiences at Livadia, in point of fact they saw more people there than they did at Tsarskoe Selo. Everyone living in the Palace was asked to luncheon, even the children's teachers and the priest, as well as four or five of the officers of the *Standart*, which was anchored at Yalta during the Imperial sojourn in the Crimea. In addition to these, three or four people, local residents or visitors, were invited every day, as well as the Ministers who came from St. Petersburg to report to the Emperor. After luncheon, conversation could be much longer than at Tsarskoe, where every hour had been filled in advance. Once or twice a week the whole Household dined with the Imperial Family, and after dinner either the Balalaika orchestra of the yacht would play, or the Cossacks of the escort would sing. During the Hessian visit there were some special command performances given by singers and musicians who happened to be passing through Yalta. Among the occasional guests was the Emir of Bokhara—son of the Emir who had attended the Coronation—who owned a villa near Livadia, to which he came every year. The Empress used to be much amused at the solemn conversations which the Emperor carried on with him through an interpreter. The Emir could talk Russian perfectly, having been educated at the *Corps des Pages*, but Oriental etiquette forbade him to talk anything but his own language on such an occasion. Two of his Ministers were always present at these interviews—immense Orientals, with long beards dyed bright red, and the most gorgeous silver and gold embroidered *khalats*. They were real figures out of the *Arabian Nights*, and looked as if any of the *Arabian Nights* adventures might have been theirs. Once the Dalai Lama of Tibet sent envoys, who brought gifts to the whole family, though Tibetan custom prevented the Empress and her daughters from being present at the reception.

Sometimes foreign ships came to Yalta—French torpedo boats, or Turkish cruisers with a Pasha on board, sent by the Sultan to greet the Emperor; but there were very few official functions at Livadia. Indeed, when the Spanish Ambassador, Count de la Vinaza, came to present his letters of recall, there was great difficulty in organising the reception suitably. Finally all ceremony was abandoned, and the Ambassador was simply received before the dinner given in his honour, for there were neither State carriages nor gala liveries at Livadia.

The Empress took an active part in all the charities of the place. She organised bazaars every year at Yalta, working for them for weeks beforehand, while she and her daughters sold at their own stall for several days. Needless to say, these were successful bazaars. There was a sad side to the Crimea, as there is to the sunny Riviera; for it was full of sanatoria for consumptives seeking sun and warmth, and these sufferers were always in the Empress's mind. It was her nature, in the sunniest moments and on the brightest days, to remember sad things, and here, too often, they were forcibly brought to her notice. She took part personally in a Flower Day in aid of the Anti-Tuberculosis League, both she and her daughters selling marguerites. She visited the hospitals and started two new sanatoria, a naval and a military one on the Imperial property of Massandra. She visited many individual cases, going unobtrusively to pay unexpected visits. When she could not go herself, she sent her daughters. It was often pointed out to her that it might be dangerous for the girls to sit at the bedsides of people who were full of tuberculous germs, but she swept these objections aside, and the Grand Duchesses visited many of the worst cases. "They should realise the sadness underneath all this beauty," she once said to me.

The Imperial Family stayed only a short time at Tsarskoe Selo in the winter of 1913–1914. They returned from the

Group at Livadia, 1913.

From left to right: the Author, Grand Duchess Marie, Grand Duchess Tatiana, Mme. Vyrouboff and Grand Duchess Anastasia.

Part of the Livadia palace.

Crimea on January 3rd, 1914, and left again for Livadia on April 5th, 1914. During the winter the Empress was present at a ball that the Dowager-Empress gave at her Anitchkoff palace in honour of her granddaughters. This was the event of the season, and was one of the few public appearances that the Empress made with her daughters. The Emperor took them to the theatre and to one or two afternoon dances; and at the Anitchkoff ball he had to stay till 4.30 in the morning (the Empress Alexandra had gone home at midnight), as the Grand Duchesses refused to be torn away any earlier. When we were all having a late cup of tea in the train that took us back to Tsarskoe, I said to the Emperor that I was glad Her Majesty had no receptions before luncheon, which would have meant early rising for me. "Yes," he said, "you can sleep. As for me, I have X. at 9.30, and as I did no work to-night I must look through some reports from the Ministers before that. So I shall have to get up at 7!" Every late outing with his daughters meant so many hours taken from his rest. It is not surprising that the Grand Duchesses were taken to very few balls by their father!

On June 13th, 1914, the Imperial Family went from Livadia to Constanza to return a visit paid by King Carol of Roumania many years before, and also a visit paid by the Crown Prince Ferdinand of Roumania and his wife and Prince Carol who had spent a couple of weeks at Tsarskoe Selo in the winter of 1913. The setting of that State visit gave it a place by itself among the many journeys that the Russian Imperial Family had taken to foreign Courts. The details of the reception had been arranged by the Crown Princess Marie. The whole Roumanian Royal Family stood on the landing stage at Constanza as the *Standart* came slowly up. The lovely Roumanian children were in a group round their mother, the Crown Princess, and Queen Elizabeth, "Carmen Sylva," with her white hair and long white robes, looked like a priestess

of ancient Greece. She was charming to her guests and welcomed them warmly. She had spent some time in Russia during her youth and had always been very enthusiastic about the country. The stay of one day was too short for all that had been planned, and the Empress was almost in a state of collapse when the visit was over. After a State drive through the town came a service at the Cathedral. Then came a family luncheon party, to the accompaniment of appropriate airs played by a Roumanian band. The Ministers and suite were, at the same time, entertained by the Roumanian Prime Minister, M. Bratiano, to another sumptuous luncheon.

After lunch the Emperor and the King visited the Russian and Roumanian ships, while the Empress rested before the tea party she was giving on the *Standart* for the Roumanian Royalties and officials. About twice the number of guests expected came to the party—I believe that there were several hundred—and the Empress was confronted with the worry, usual to most housewives but most unusual for her, of wondering if there would be enough to eat! Count Benckendorff had not gone with their Majesties on this journey and his absence was much felt. After the tea party all the Royalties, with the exception of the Empress and Queen Elizabeth, went to a review of the Roumanian troops, the Grand Duchess Olga driving with the Crown Princess. The young Grand Duchess was the centre of all eyes, for it was much hoped that a marriage would be arranged between her and Prince Carol.

The day closed with a State dinner at the Palace, at which the King and the Emperor exchanged speeches. The Emperor's clear elocution made his speech much more impressive than King Carol's, which was spoilt by the strong German accent with which he spoke French. A special hall designed by the Crown Princess in the Byzantine style in green and gold had been built on to the small Palace expressly for this dinner. The lovely room,

the flowers and the wonderful Hohenzollern plate brought specially from Bucharest took away the formal impression usual at such State banquets. The Empress was dressed in flowing classic draperies with a diamond bandeau in her hair. Queen Elizabeth had forgotten her Orders, and the Empress took off hers to be in keeping with her hostess. The Crown Princess Marie alone wore her Orders, and her only other ornament was a large diamond cross on a long chain. It was amusing to note that this fashion had been copied by all her countrywomen. Most of the ladies present wore huge crosses, some in diamonds, some in gold, which dangled about their persons; but the effect on others was not always so successful as it was on the Crown Princess.

The Empress could scarcely get through the *cercle* after dinner, and from sheer exhaustion could take but little interest in the fireworks and torchlight procession, which was the students' share in the entertainment, and which the Emperor and his daughters watched from the balcony of the Palace with the Roumanian Royalties. It was about midnight when the last adieux were said on board the *Standart* and the yacht weighed anchor. The Empress had only strength to wave a limp hand to the people on the landing stage. Fortunately the journey back was not so rough as the coming had been, for the next day there was a visit to Odessa. The Empress just managed to get through a large reception of ladies and a service in the Cathedral before she had to retire, leaving the Emperor and the children to carry out the rest of the programme alone. The stay at Odessa was followed by a journey to Kischineff, for the unveiling of a monument to Alexander I.

A few days after the return to Tsarskoe Selo the King of Saxony came on a State visit, and the usual ceremonial of dinners and reviews took place, but as this was a visit of a " Queenless " King, it was far less fatiguing than such visits usually were for the Empress. After the King left, the British Fleet under the command of Admiral Beatty

arrived at Cronstadt, the Emperor and Empress with their children going on board the ships. Admiral Beatty and his wife and members of his staff were entertained at lunch by their Majesties at Tsarskoe Selo. After this the Court went to Peterhof, and there, soon after their arrival, they heard the news of the Archduke Franz Ferdinand's murder at Sarajevo. This news greatly impressed and horrified the Imperial Family, but at first it was never supposed that this tragic event would be followed by such terrible consequences. Preparations were being made for the visit of President Poincaré, and everyone believed that the Balkan question could be settled without Russia being involved. The Empress was making plans for spending the autumn in the Crimea and had already invited her guests. Before the Presidential visit, the whole family went for a few days' cruise in the Finnish waters. The President arrived at Peterhof on July 19th and was met on the landing stage by the Emperor, the Empress receiving him later in full state at the palace. He lunched privately with their Majesties, and delighted the Cesarevitch and the Grand Duchesses with the presents he brought them. A big official dinner was given in his honour in the Peterhof Palace—an eighteenth-century building, kept unchanged since the days of Peter the Great, even to the wax candles that lit up the halls. The whole Court and the President and his suite attended the tattoo at the camp of Krasnoe Selo. At this great review President Poincaré saw the *élite* of the Russian army, so many of whom were soon to lay down their lives for their country. The review was followed by a command performance at the local theatre ; and the French President gave a return entertainment on board the battleship *France*, to which the Empress and her elder daughters went with the Emperor. The political future was uncertain, the horizon was dark, but no one imagined that these were the last days before the outbreak of war.

The Empress Alexandra Feodorovna in Court dress, 1912.

CHAPTER XIX

WAR-TIME, 1914

THE outbreak of the world war came as a terrible blow to the Empress. She seemed to have a presentiment of coming events; for she was most depressed when they left the *Standart*, on which she had gone with the Emperor to recover from the fatigues of the Presidential visit, and said to some of those with her that she knew it would be the last cruise they would all take together. She had a horror of war. The memories of the Russo-Japanese War, and of the troubles that had followed, were yet too fresh in her mind. The Emperor and she hoped to the last that some agreement might be reached. Though the Emperor did not distress her by giving her all the details of the Governmental discussions, she felt very anxious, but she still did not realise how tense the situation had become.

On the first of August the Empress and her daughters waited a long time for the Emperor to come down to dinner. As a rule he was very punctual, and the Empress felt that something serious must have happened. He was receiving the Minister for Foreign Affairs, M. Sazonoff, and the audience seemed to last inordinately long. When the Emperor came, it was with the news that Germany had declared war. At first the Empress could not grasp it. War! her nightmare! She knew the completeness of German organisation; she knew that Russia was not prepared for war at that moment; and that England had not yet joined Russia and France. She was in despair,

but, then and always, she had the conviction that Russia would win in the end.

The moment of the declaration of war made her set up a wall in her heart between Germany and Russia. She was the Empress of Russia—Russian always in heart and soul. "Twenty years have I spent in Russia, half my life, and the happiest, fullest part of it. It is the country of my husband and son. I have lived the life of a happy wife and mother in Russia. All my heart is bound to this country I love," she once said to me during the war. People in Germany do not understand how the Empress came to adopt the Russian standpoint so completely, and become so thoroughly Russian in her views. The reason for it was her intense, passionate love for the Emperor. She considered herself as wholly belonging to him. *His* country was *her* country, as also his religion had completely become hers. She always gave herself up entirely to those she loved, and identified herself with them.

The thought of her brother and of his feelings at having to take part in a war where he would be in the other camp gave her acute pain, but she brought her will-power to bear to face the inevitable. She regarded the inexplicable telegram[1] sent by the Emperor William, after his ambassador, Count Pourtales, had already handed the declaration of war to the Russian Foreign Minister, as an attempt to shift the responsibility for the outbreak of war on to the Emperor Nicholas, and was very indignant. The mystery of that telegram has never been explained. She expressed her opinion on the matter to the Cesarevitch's Swiss tutor, M. Pierre Gilliard, who quotes the conversation fully in his book, *Thirteen Years at the Russian Court.* According to her wont, the Empress did not remain content with

[1] This was the telegram that the Emperor Nicholas received from the German Emperor at 2 A.M. on August 2nd, fully seven hours after the declaration of war by Germany was handed by Count Pourtales to M. Sazonoff. It seemed to ignore the fact that Germany had declared war, and was worded as if negotiations were still possible. The text of this telegram is given in Kautsky, *Die Deutschen Dokumente etc.*, under No. 600.

lamentations. At ten o'clock at night on the day of the declaration of war, I came back from a drive, not knowing what had happened. My maid told me that a woman's voice from the Imperial villa had rung me up three times during the last hour, that it was either one of the Grand Duchesses or the Empress herself. I immediately rang up "Alexandria," the Emperor's villa, and found the Empress already at the telephone. In a voice broken by suppressed sobs, she told me of the event. "War is declared," she said. "Good Heavens, so Austria has done it!" I exclaimed. "No, no," she said, "Germany. It is ghastly, terrible—but God will help and will save Russia . . . But we must work . . . go at once to Mme. E. and speak to her about opening the workshop at the Hermitage. Then talk to my secretary and ring me up —no matter how late, or come round." She entered into details, getting calmer as she spoke, giving minute instructions. I spoke to the Empress again later. She was perfectly calm, having got over her momentary weakness.

The next day, August 2nd, the Emperor and Empress with their daughters—the little Cesarevitch was ill—went to St. Petersburg to attend a solemn *Te Deum* at the Winter Palace. This was an old custom that had been followed at the outbreak of the Japanese War. Crowds of people thronged the Winter Palace; they were in a very frenzy of patriotism. Ladies clung to the Emperor, kissing his hands. No one alive had seen such enthusiasm, which was reminiscent of 1812. At the outbreak of the Japanese War there had been some street demonstrations of students in the early days, but now the whole country was roused. The climax was reached when the Emperor, addressing the officers present, repeated Alexander I's promise of 1812 —not to conclude peace while a single enemy still remained on Russian soil. Sir George Buchanan, in his book, *My Mission to Russia*, quotes the words: "I solemnly swear not to make peace, as long as there is a single enemy on

Russia's soil." Multitudes cheered in the streets, and when the Emperor and Empress appeared at the Palace windows, the whole crowd that thronged the huge square spontaneously knelt down and sang the National Anthem.

The Douma, in a memorable sitting, expressed its loyal feelings in words of ardent patriotism, so that the Emperor felt that the whole country was behind him.

On board the yacht that took them to Peterhof, the Emperor and Empress spoke optimistically to their suite of the turn events were taking and of their admiration for the spirit of the people. Telegrams were brought in just then, describing the plucky conduct of the young Grand Duchess of Luxembourg, and the Empress was full of admiration for her.

When the mobilisation was announced in the St. Petersburg military district, the Guards were the first to go. The Empress went to a *Te Deum* before her Lancer regiment left for the front, and said goodbye in person to all the officers and men. All through the war she followed the actions of this regiment, and after every battle in which the Lancers took part she helped all the families to get news.

The Dowager-Empress was in England on a visit to Queen Alexandra, when war became imminent. She tried to cross Germany on her way from London to St. Petersburg, but war was declared while she was on her way, and she was not allowed to go farther than Berlin, being directed from there to Copenhagen. She had to travel all the roundabout way over Sweden and Haparanda in the extreme North. On her way through Germany she was treated with great hostility and greeted with insults by the German crowd. Alexandra Feodorovna, in a conversation she had later with M. Gilliard, said very strongly what she felt at her mother-in-law's treatment. When the Empress Marie Feodorovna returned to Peterhof after her long journey, she was met with unwonted ceremony by the Emperor and Empress as an expression of their

affectionate and dutiful regard for her. The Empress also spoke to M. Gilliard of her own little Darmstadt, which, as she had often said to me, she always in her mind completely separated from the rest of Germany :

> What ever has happened to the Germany of my childhood? I have such happy and poetic memories of my early years at Darmstadt and the good friends I had there. But on my later visits, Germany seemed to me a changed country—a country I did not know and had never known. . . . I had no community of thought or feeling with anyone, except the old friends of days gone by. Prussia has meant Germany's ruin. The German people have been deceived. Feelings of hatred and revenge, which are quite foreign to their nature, have been instilled into them. It will be a terrible, monstrous struggle ; humanity is about to pass through ghastly sufferings.

The Imperial Family had been prevented by the Cesarevitch's health from leaving for Moscow, where, according to old custom, they had "to announce the war to the inhabitants of the ancient capital." The child had hurt his leg and was again laid up. By ill-luck these accidents always happened before some public function, at which, if he appeared at all, he had to be carried in the arms of a stalwart Cossack. The Empress was in despair, as she feared that the idea would get about that the Cesarevitch was permanently lame. However, it was decided that the ceremony could not be delayed for his recovery, as his leg was stiff and would take some time to get right.

The sovereigns arrived at Moscow on August 17th and found a great welcome awaiting them. If any place could have shown more enthusiasm than did St. Petersburg it was Moscow. The crowds in the streets, the nobility, the *Zemstvos*—all showed the greatest patriotic excitement. The Emperor's informal drive through the city was an occasion for great demonstrations of loyalty, such as had only been seen at the State entrance at the Coronation. At the solemn service in the Cathedral

of the Assumption the Allied Ambassadors, Sir George Buchanan and M. Paléologue, were present, and when the Imperial procession returned from the cathedral to the Kremlin in a scene of delirious enthusiasm, the Emperor asked the Ambassadors to walk closer to him, saying "These acclamations are addressed to you as well as to me."

Moscow was in a frenzy of activity. Things were being hastily organised. The Emperor and Empress went everywhere, and all day long saw various people in connection with war work. The Empress sat till late in her small dressing-room, the room she generally used, discussing war charities with the Grand Duchess Elisabeth Feodorovna (Serge), who had at once begun to take an active part in everything as well as doing her usual work at the "Obitel." The Imperial party inspected the *Zemstvo* relief organisations, those of the nobility, and of the merchants, and the hospitals that had just been opened and many others. The Empress never thought of her health. She braced herself to do more than ordinary human strength could manage. She seemed indefatigable, and her suite could scarcely keep up with her. She wrote to Princess Louis of Battenberg, describing her work in her haste in telegraphic style :

Awfully busy. Have seen splendid *sklad* of merchants—nobility, Zemstvos and mine. Blessed two hundred sisters, going to the war. Saw my train well arranged. Fastening images on to strings, whenever free.[1] Returning over St. Serge and there part from Ella. . . . Have no news from many people who could not return or be found and return in an awful plight, bruised, ill-treated. Such horrors they have gone through, it's inconceivable, simply twentieth-century culture. Saw a few wounded, happily nothing serious. Shall get my hospitals in order at Zarskoe [*sic*] and then set Olga and Tatiana to work.

[1] The Empress wanted every man of the immense army to have something made with her own hands and strung innumerable images all through the war. Very few knew this : and the work only tired her, without being appreciated by those for whom she worked.

Having bad health makes all more difficult and stops me from doing many things one would have wished to. Glad for dear Ella's sake, that we have been here to cheer her up. . . . She has any amount to do, is energetic, here there and everywhere. All help as they only can. It is right one prints no news [from the front], but it is anguishing (August 21st, 1914).

At one time there was a suggestion that the Imperial Family should transfer their residence to Moscow for the time of the war, and should live at the Neskoutchnoe Palace, a little way out of town. It was even inspected for the purpose by officials of the Court, but the idea came to nothing. The visit to St. Serge, one of the oldest sanctuaries in Russia, took place on August 21st, and the Abbot blessed and gave to the Emperor an antique ikon that had always accompanied the Russian Tsars in their war campaigns. At Tsarskoe Selo the Empress continued to work with the same feverish energy. She thought out a whole programme of work based on her experiences of the last war, but greatly changed and improved. She desired to adapt as many palaces as possible for hospital work, feeling that all available space was likely to be needed. The Petroffsky Palace at Moscow had already been turned into a hospital, the " Poteshny " was soon to follow. The Nicholas Palace, the former home of the Grand Duchess Serge, was a *sklad*. At Tsarskoe Selo, the Catherine Palace, where all the *fêtes* used to be given, was to be a hospital for officers. In the existing Court hospital the Empress and her daughters began their practical training. Princess Hedroits, a well-known surgeon, was at the head of the hospital. The Empress thought her daughters too young to nurse, and agreed to their request only on the understanding that they and she should go through a course of training. All three went through the usual probationer's course and could be seen every morning working at the hospital. Her Majesty was deft and very quick-handed, and brought

to the work, what was far more precious to the patient, her understanding of suffering and her capacity for comfort. Neither mother nor daughters ever shirked the most fatiguing and difficult task. The Grand Duchess Tatiana showed special aptitude for the work. It had a scientific interest for her, apart from its human side.

Both young girls were very enthusiastic, and when they had passed their examinations insisted on going on with their hospital duties. The Empress did the same. It gave her moral satisfaction to feel that she was really working for the wounded, and her work made her forget the anxieties and sorrows that pressed on her. Writing at this time, she says :

> To some it may seem unnecessary my doing this, but I can much better then look after my hospital here, and help is much needed, and every hand is useful, and it does one good, and draws one's thought away from much sorrow.

Her soothing influence helped many a wounded man through the agonising moments before an operation, and many a dying soldier passed away happier for her presence. The humblest in her hospital, when he called for the Tsaritsa, would see her at his side. This was a great physical and still greater mental strain. Sometimes she had only just come home when a message from her hospital would tell her that a specially bad case called for her. She would seize the first free moment to rush back to the hospital in her car. She visited the other hospitals at Tsarskoe Selo constantly, and those in St. Petersburg about once a week in that year. Her letters to Princess Louis are almost all full of her hospital work :

> With my big girls I went to Pskoff one day, privately, as sisters, to see Marie.[1] Then we went out to meet Nicky at Grodno, visited hospitals also there and at Dwinsk together. When he goes off again, shall go to more towns. It's shy work, but the sisters' dresses help one. We wear it on such inspection

[1] Grand Duchess Marie Pavlovna, jr.

The Empress and her eldest daughters in nurses' dress, 1915.

The Grand Duchesses Anastasia, Marie and Tatiana.
Tsarskoe Selo. April, 1917.

journeys without Nicky. We passed our exams and received the Red Cross on our aprons and got the certificates of sisters of the war time. It was an emotion putting them on, and appearing with the other sisters—40—who had finished their course. We had a Moleben [*Te Deum*] in my Red Cross Church. We are continuing lectures about illnesses, medicaments, anatomy, etc., to have a fuller course and we all enjoy it. Our mornings at the hospital continue, and weekly a train arrives with fresh wounded. Three thousand places at Zarskoe and Pawlowsk. In the Big palace we have officers and I go there every afternoon to see one, who is specially suffering. He is contusioned, and in the last week always unconscious, recognising nobody. When I come, he regularly recognises me, and then remains with a clear head all the night. He thinks he sleeps all day, suffers hideously—such cramps in the head and whole body—nerves too shattered, poor soul. He is touching with me, I remind him of his mother's kindness and as soon as I come, takes me at first for her (she is dead). When I call him and talk, he stares, then recognises me, clasps my hands to his breast, says he now feels warm and happy. His children are in Siberia and his wife (that has not made him happy) too. (November 25th, 1914.)

Such sad cases always awakened the Empress's sympathy.[1] There were several such unknown, solitary men, from obscure line regiments, who died in her hospital whose last hours were comforted by the Empress. She lost her shyness in her nurses' dress. She felt she was one of many, and to all in the hospital she showed herself in her true light and as her home circle knew her.

Many princesses wore nurses' dress during the war, and in many cases the feeling that dictated this was admired and understood. To the general public in Russia, however, and particularly to the uneducated mind, this was not the case. The Empress was advised not to wear nurses' dress when she went about the country during the war. She was unknown in the towns, and the people did not recognise

[1] The Empress later ordered apartments to be put at the disposal of the wives and mothers of the officers who were in her hospital, who were too poor to incur the expense of an hotel.

her when she came without the usual apparel, and so the effect on the public of the Imperial visit was lost.

At the close of the year the Empress wrote to her old governess :

Zarskoe Selo,
January 8th, 1915.

Darling Madgie,—I cannot tell you how deeply touched I was that you sent Ella and me those charming books and we thank you heartily, as also for your dear letter. We did not send you any present, not being sure with these abominable times whether a parcel would ever reach you. During your Xmas we were at Moscow—he [the Emperor] was away a month from here and the children and I two weeks. I visited hospitals in 8 towns with my big girls and in Moscow he joined us from the Caucasus and the 3 little ones from Zarskoe.

The result has been that my heart has been so bad again and such weakness—I utterly overtired myself. Nothing is more tiring than visiting heaps of hospitals and speaking by the hour to the poor wounded. So I have not been able to work in the hospital now, which is a great grief to me, as I love the work and find consolation in nursing the sick and binding up their wounds however terrible they may be. And we assist at operations and I always gave the instruments.

We have many hospitals at Zarskoe and now Xmas trees everywhere and the children go instead of us. He has also been in bed with a chill and cough—overtired, but now almost well again. The children are all right, thank God. Winter has been mild here in the North, but now severe cold has set in, but not much snow. Such a sad Xmas, one's thoughts are all at the war. Will send this off now and hope it will reach you safely.

Very tenderest blessings and kisses,

From your fondly loving

P.Q. No. III

Alix.

CHAPTER XX

THE EMPRESS'S WAR WORK, 1915

AT the end of 1914 and the beginning of the following year the Empress again had a moment of great popularity. Even people who were not in sympathy with her admitted this: for instance, the Minister for Foreign Affairs, S. D. Sazonoff, spoke of it to me on one occasion when I was lunching at the Foreign Office in 1915. The Empress travelled about, she was seen in public, her work became known. "One must take things personally in hand," she had written to Princess Louis on March 23rd, 1915.

Neither the Red Cross nor the Commissariat could cope with the ever-growing demands of the hospitals for linen and supplies. The Empress arranged for her *sklads* to co-operate with these institutions, particularly in helping small military hospitals, close to the fighting line. She had *sklads* at Petrograd, Moscow, Odessa, and Vinnitza, and a whole line of lesser *sklads* in small towns near the front. Their sphere of activity became very wide. Supply trains and single carriages attached to empty ambulance trains took hospital material from the main *sklads* up to the fighting line. Automobile squads had been formed in Poland in connection with these trains, most of them being run by members of the great Polish families, who put their private cars at the disposal of the *sklads*. They did excellent work all through the war. The needs of the moment were what guided the Empress and her assistants. At the head of the Moscow *sklad*, which directed the whole work, was M. Nicholas de Meck, always called by the Empress

"Uncle Meck," and his nephew V. V. Meck. The Petrograd *sklads* were organised by Princess E. N. Obolensky; Count Apraxine, the Empress's gentleman-in-waiting, was continually going with the trains to the front, to see how everything was working. To villages where there were no baths, the Empress had bath cars sent out, attached to the supply trains. These the soldiers greatly appreciated; they called these cars the "disinsection" cars—an apt mispronunciation of the word! In the winter warm clothing was supplied, as well as linen. In 1915, when the armies were more stationary, she arranged to send field churches. The country in which the fighting was taking place was Catholic, and there were few Orthodox churches. Priests went out with these portable churches, and were a great comfort to many dying men, unable to get into touch with the regimental priests.

New ideas were always working themselves out in the Empress's brain. The days were too short for her. The Empress wrote to Princess Louis on March 23rd, 1915:

> My heart got so bad again, there was lots of work, and it helps me when the heart is heavy and, knowing you bring happiness, how not go to the poor wounded? and forget yourself? My day was like that: at 9.30, a second into the Znamenia church to get my blessing for the day's work, then with Olga to the Big Palace to see a very seriously wounded officer (through the lungs). At 10 Tatiana fetched us (after her lesson) and they dropped me at Ania's. At 10.30–1, we worked at our hospital, with officers and men, and operations, rather often appendicitis, etc., too. Then I would go and sit with that poor officer again, for an hour or more, then pass through the other wards. After tea rested, if did not have audiences or officers to bid goodbye, before returning to the war. After dinner, off to Ania or to the hospital, or to both according to necessity. Now my poor officer died, and that finished me off, besides had to go to town to a hospital, and so on.

The Empress does not say that, besides all this, she looked through the papers her secretary sent her till late at night,

and began to work at them again, early in the morning, before going to her hospital. There was sometimes no chance for the Household to see her, except at lunch, and she usually had her ladies on business at that time.

It was evident that such feverish activity could not be kept up long by a woman so delicate as the Empress. Only sheer will-power kept her going during the first five months of the war. She fell ill in December 1914. Heart trouble reappeared,[1] caused by the long standing and the real, hard physical work to which she was, naturally, unaccustomed, and by the motoring, which had always disagreed with her. Added to this was the mental strain of continual contact with suffering, in which she was always spending herself whole-heartedly in helping and comforting others. She roused herself at the time of her friend Mme. Vyrouboff's illness in January 1915, but afterwards had a serious set-back, and could not leave the Palace for several weeks. She went on intermittently with her hospital work, being loth to give it up entirely, but she could stand it less and less. She hated to admit that she was beaten by her health, but in 1916 she was completely worn out.

The Empress Alexandra Feodorovna wrote to her sister that she was determined not to be "a mere doll." Every official in her trains near the fighting line could telegraph to her personally, reporting his movements and appealing to her in cases of difficulty. If action had to be taken promptly, the Empress telegraphed herself, stating the case and asking for the necessary measures to be taken as soon as possible. She hated formality and red tape, and she felt that the interests of the wounded should always come before everything else. Personal sympathies or antipathies did not influence her in her work.

[1] The heart trouble that at first had been only a nervous affection then became really serious. She had constant pain and a feeling of suffocation, while almost chronic facial neuralgia had taken the place of the sciatica from which she used to suffer so badly. On account of her heart trouble she had to submit reluctantly to be carried upstairs in the hospitals she visited, though she loathed "making a spectacle of herself."

The organisation known as the " Union of Towns " did very useful work, with the assistance of the *Zemstvos* ; but the Empress was rather distrustful of them, as she had heard that much political propaganda was carried on under cover of their war activity. One of their chief leaders was Purishkevitch, the future murderer of Rasputine. The Empress referred to him in a letter to me :

Please let X know that Purishkevitch asks " for ten thousand pieces of body linen for the Dvinsk, Riga and Minsk front. Have arranged baths and that linen is urgently needed. Have arrived to-day, leaving to-morrow." It's good to give Purishkevitch as much as one can, as he really works well. I several times helped him. Tell them to answer at once—he is in town.

Though, naturally, she did not correspond with her relations in Germany, the Empress thought of them often with sadness. It was a great comfort to her to know that the Grand Duke of Hesse and his armies were not fighting on the Russian front. She wrote to Princess Louis on November 25th, 1914 :

To-day is our Ernie's birthday, the first time in his life that three sisters can give him no news. How lonely he must be away from his dear ones, in a foreign country and hating the war. . . . One's heart bleeds, thinking of all the misery everywhere and what will be afterwards ! The amount of lies, printed in the German papers (and in Turkey), is sickening. The fright of the German prisoners that they were going to be shot, and noses and ears chopped off, and their surprise and contentment, when they are well treated and fed, are great. Ella will return in a few days from Lwoff [Lemberg]. She wired that she was in the Carpathen, that there was snow in Lwoff and bitterly cold. Contented with what she saw and my *sklad* there and my four *sklad* trains working.

Nearly all the male members of the Russian Imperial Family were with the army. All the Grand Duchesses either had *sklads* or worked in the hospitals. The whole Court lived in a war atmosphere, everything being coloured by the news from the front. The disaster of Seldau was a

terrible blow, relieved to some extent by the Marne victory. The Empress writes on October 21st, 1914:

> One's heart bleeds, such misery, such losses. The worst is, when one cannot get the news about the losses for ages. From home, no news, of course. Mavra [1] returns to-morrow, after burying her poor son, Oleg. It's one's consolation to be with the wounded and dress their wounds and look after them. All are well here. Ducky [2] is out with Miechen's [3] sanitary train, not as a nurse but to look after all, and works well. Olga [4] and Marie [5] are still out in the hospitals.

When the Emperor was away, as he frequently was, reviewing troops and visiting munition factories, the Empress with her daughters and a lady-in-waiting went on tours of inspection to provincial hospitals. These were often long journeys, and although the Imperial train was very comfortably fitted up, it was no small undertaking. In 1914–1915 the Empress visited more towns than ever before during all her years in Russia. She wanted to see for herself how things could best be improved, and to show her personal interest in as many wounded as possible. She would have liked these to be surprise visits, in which she could dispense with ceremony and see things thoroughly, and this was managed several times in Petrograd. But on longer journeys, it was pointed out to the Empress that it would not be fair for some people who might have worked untiringly in the hospitals not to know of her visit, as they might perhaps just happen to be away on the day she came, if her visit was a surprise one. The thing that the Empress hated most of all was to feel something was being hidden from her, that she was being shown some "Potemkine" villages. On one occasion it was evident that she was not wanted to see a particular hospital in one

[1] Grand Duchess Constantine.
[2] Grand Duchess Victoria Feodorovna.
[3] Grand Duchess Marie Pavlovna Vladimir.
[4] Grand Duchess Olga Alexandrovna.
[5] Grand Duchess Marie Pavlovna, jr.

of the towns she visited. She was told that the hospital was too far, that the road was impossible, and that there were scarcely any patients in it. The Empress replied that a few would be as much pleased to see her as a number. At last she was told that the bridge on the river was impassable, and as this excuse was corroborated, she had to give in. She sent her gentleman to "ford" the river, should this prove necessary. The bridge *was* under repair, but this was the only story that proved true, and the hospital was not one of the glories of the town.

The Empress went with the Emperor to Dvinsk and Grodno, and they also made a tour of the central towns, the Empress meeting the Emperor on the way—he had been inspecting some troops. In every town they made a tour of the hospitals, seeing the wounded, the Empress lingering near specially bad cases. Sometimes they saw as many as 3000 men in a day. Even when she was without the Emperor she had great ovations in nearly every town. At Kharkoff, for example, the students gave her a rousing welcome, and her car could scarcely move through the wildly cheering crowd. Later in the war the welcome was more stilted and formal, but the Empress did not seem to notice it. Only once did she feel some coldness in her reception, and this was in Moscow, the first time she went alone there in 1914. She had had the Governor informed that the visit was a private one and that she wanted to visit the hospitals under the Grand Duchess Elisabeth's guidance. The Empress and her daughters wore nurses' dresses, and the Governor let it be known that the Empress had come *incognita*. No one in the town knew of her arrival, the streets were mostly empty, and those who met Her Majesty did not recognise her. She felt hurt, and thought that it was the result of some intrigue against her.

The pleasure she believed she was giving kept the Empress going all the time, but she would come back to the train so tired that she could only sink down on the first

chair in utter exhaustion, unable even to go to her own compartment. She allowed herself no respite ; even when ostensibly resting she would be looking through the innumerable petitions she received in every town till her daughters would entreat her to stop. When she saw an ambulance train at any station, she would throw a coat over her rest gown and rush out to inspect it. She thought that people would feel slighted if they saw the Imperial train and she did not go and see them. She never shrank from the overcrowded carriages or the saddest sights, and would stand in the close atmosphere, her face on a level with the upper rows of bunks, while the doctors gave her a detailed account of their work. She drove in some curious and impromptu vehicles in many of the towns. Sometimes a car was placed at her disposal, sometimes the antique coach of an archbishop, sometimes even the homely *isvoztchik* (cab). Outward displays seemed to her needless, and even wrong at such a time. Her desire to pass unnoticed was sometimes disappointed. I remember a case in point, when the Empress stopped for a couple of hours at Bielgorod, on her way from Kharkoff. There was a monastery there—a well-known place of pilgrimage—which she wished to visit. She wanted no one disturbed on her account, as the train passed Bielgorod in the evening. No one in the town knew of her arrival. With her daughters, General Ressine, Mme. Vyrouboff and myself, she set off in the very worst possible *isvoztchik* over muddy, bumpy roads in the pitch darkness to the monastery. Great was the Empress's disappointment to find the whole monastery brilliantly lighted and the sleepy Archbishop in full vestments preceded by equally sleepy monks bearing lighted tapers ! Someone had evidently raised the alarm. The Empress was led in procession from her humble conveyance, the Archbishop respectfully holding her arm, to the church, where a solemn *Te Deum* was chanted. Her mischievous daughters were much amused at their mother's " unobtrusive " visit, but

most of all at the appearance of the conveyance, drawn up with great dignity for our departure!

There were no German prisoners at any of the hospitals their Majesties ever went to, as these were mostly in hospitals set apart especially for them; but at Dvinsk they saw some German civilians who had been taken prisoners by the advancing armies. Among them was a man of about 80, who threw himself on his knees before the Emperor and begged for his liberty. The old man looked like an ancient patriarch with a long flowing beard; the people with him, women and children, were all his family. The Emperor at once gave the order for his release, and he was sent back to the German lines.

All the winter of 1914–1915 there was not much movement on the Russian front; but the Empress personally had a strenuous time, for Ania Vyrouboff was the victim of a terrible railway accident which left her lame for life. Mme. Vyrouboff had both legs broken, her spine injured and her skull fractured. The Empress scarcely left her side for the first three days after the accident, though she was herself in a very poor state of health. The Empress was torn at this time in many directions, as there were serious cases in her hospitals, who also wanted her, and she was continually on the road from one sick bed to the other; but she wrote on March 23rd to Princess Louis that "the wounded's grateful smiles are a recompense for every fatigue." In March 1915 Lwoff was taken and the Austrian fortress, Przemysl, fell. This was hailed with delirious joy by the country. In the same letter of March 23rd to Princess Louis, the Empress wrote:

> Such gratitude fills one's heart, that Peremyschel [*sic*] has fallen at last. Now one can breathe freer, as it kept many troops, which we needed to send elsewhere. Thank God, on all sides the news is better and in France too. One's heart suffers for the ships in the Dardanelles—such an ignoble way of fighting. I loathe these mines. Three minutes and all over—brave souls.

How glorious, when St. Sophia will be again a Christian church, if we live to see it.

To Miss Jackson she wrote:

Zarskoe Selo,
March 26th, 1915.

My darling Madgie,—I hope this letter will reach you by Easter, it is to bring you my tender love and blessings. We feast it the same time this year, I am glad to say—I do hope there will be no fighting for a few days then, it would be hard.

There is so much to do, tho' I am lying since a week again—overtired my heart and strength—so despairing when one wants to be useful, not only with the brain.

We have cold sunny days, masses of snow. The fall of Peremishel was such a Godsend, as it kept so many of our troops occupied which will now be free to throw elsewhere. It is interesting to have that old Russian town back again. . . .

All are busy sending off Easter parcels with linen, eggs, Koulitch (bread one specially bakes for Easter), tobacco, sweets, writing paper, candles, etc., and a little Image always for them to wear. I have several 100 of letters of thanks for our presents all these months.

Must end now.

A tender kiss fr. yr. loving old
P.Q. No. III
Alix.

Ella is well—have not met since Dec.

The Emperor went to the two Galician towns very soon after their capture. The Empress was at first a little dubious about this, though she would not admit that she had tried to dissuade him from going there so soon. And when she wrote to Princess Louis on April 30th she said:

Nicky was at Lwoff and Peremyschel—most interesting. He has not yet returned as he went to Odessa, Sebastopol to see the troops, dockyards, etc. We expect him back in about 5 days. But spies are everywhere! Going to Bielostock, one threw masses of bombs from the aeroplanes on that town—railway—on Olga's sanitary train too. In time Nicky turned off—so filthy!

To the same she says later :

I would to God, that this hideous bloodshed would end—but it is too early. The work is not yet done, and they still underrate us. One day they advance, the next we, and on the other side too.

And a week later :

How too outrageous the sinking of the *Lusitania*. There are things one *cannot* understand (May 11th, 1915).

During the war the Empress and her children stayed the whole year round at Tsarskoe Selo, as a change of residence would have interrupted the hospital work. The Empress spent few hours actually nursing, but still went to her hospital. One hears an echo of the operating theatre in a letter to her sister, May 11th, 1915 :

An officer died on the table. A very difficult operation succeeded, then the heart gave way. Hard such moments, but my girlies must know life, and we go through all together.

She wanted to arrange sanatoria for the wounded in the Russian watering-places, which were " splendid " but " primitively arranged." She was tied to her sofa mostly now, but new ideas were always taking shape, and her old charities had to be attended to as well. She was keenly interested in the development of the " School of Popular Art " [1] she had started, and the newly-founded " Society for the Protection of Mothers and Infants," which united all infant welfare work in the country.

In the summer of 1915 the Empress had a call on her sympathy in the Imperial Family, for the Grand Duke Constantine died on June 18th. The Grand Duke was a

[1] The School of Popular Art was a new departure. The Empress had been the soul of it. She wanted to revive old peasant industries and develop them, while raising the standard of their work, by reintroducing the beautiful old designs that had fallen into oblivion. Peasant girls from all over the country and nuns went through a two years' course in the school in order to learn all the branches of peasant crafts as well as designing. A museum was attached to it and the pupils' taste was formed by means of lectures explaining the models in the museum. They were destined to become teachers in different branches of peasant industries in the village and convent schools.

man of great culture and a well-known poet. He had been very hard hit by the war, as he had lost a promising young son and his daughter a very gallant husband. The Grand Duke's death came at a time when events on the Russian front had taken a serious turn. The Empress's letters show her anxiety. After the Galician successes of the winter and spring, the Germans came to the assistance of their allies. General von Mackensen attacked the Russian armies, which had to retreat all along the line it had cost such efforts to take. The shortage of munitions and the rapidity of the Russian advance in the winter were largely responsible for this. On all sides the news was bad.[1] The Empress spoke of the uncertainty of the fortune of war, but the losses greatly depressed her. She began to feel, like the rest of the country, that something was amiss. Her letters are full of the losses, and she wrote once that nearly all her Siberian rifle regiment had been gassed. Things got worse towards the autumn. One fortress after another fell. The Empress clung to the crumbs of comfort: the fortresses were old, and the loss of life was small. Still, her letters breathe the anxiety she had for those around her, to whom she always showed a brave face. On August 31st, 1915, she wrote to Princess Louis:

They are advancing at great speed. Our misery, the lack of rifles and heavy artillery, like theirs. They bring more and more to our side. Will England and France never help us? We leave the fortresses, nothing can withstand 16-inch guns—old fortresses after all—and to lose lives uselessly is no good. The further they come the worse for them—the getting out. Must hope for an early, cold winter. We were not prepared for war and they were thoroughly, and then, they are splendid at organizing things, laying lines and so on, but God will help! The misery of the thousands of fugitives, who block up the rear! One does what one can for them, but the quantity is so colossal.

[1] There were fears for Petrograd at one time and it was suggested that the collections of the Hermitage should be taken to Moscow, but this was vetoed by the Emperor, who knew what a panic it would cause.

Public opinion became still further disquieted. Some one had to be the scapegoat for the reverses, and the hatred of the moment fastened itself on the Minister of War, General Soukhomlinoff. He had assured the Cabinet at the memorable sitting at the outbreak of the war that he could fulfil all demands, but he had underestimated the actual supplies of war material. A commission of inquiry was appointed by the Emperor, and General Soukhomlinoff was dismissed, though the charge of high treason was disproved by the judgment of the court. General Polivanoff was appointed Minister of War in his stead, but this did not solve the imminent problem. The retreat was going on. What was to be done to sustain the morale of the armies ?

CHAPTER XXI

TSARSKOE SELO WITHOUT THE EMPEROR, 1915–1916

THE retreat of the summer of 1915 was marked by many glorious deeds. The officers and men were wonderful in their heroic endurance and resistance to forces superior in numbers, in arms, and in equipment. The losses were terrible. The continual reverses which gave the whole country reasons for the gravest anxiety pointed to some serious defects in the organisation. The Emperor heard much criticism of the Staff. From the very outset of the war the Emperor had been displeased to note that orders from Headquarters were often in opposition to orders from the Home Office in the parts of the country near the seat of war, and grave inconvenience resulted. There also the Staff was blamed. The troops, on the other hand, were beginning to be discouraged by the disasters. The Grand Duke Nicholas could not be persuaded to make a clean sweep of those of whom the most bitter criticisms were made. There seemed to be only one way in which to make a complete change and at the same time inspire the army with new energy. The Emperor decided to take the supreme command himself. His first idea was to retain the Grand Duke Nicholas at Headquarters so as to avoid any appearance of slight to him. The course presented many difficulties, and the Grand Duke was appointed Commander-in-Chief on the Caucasian front.

The Emperor took over the supreme command on September 5th, 1915. In doing this, he was fulfilling his secret wish since the beginning of the war. He had

longed to be with his armies as Alexander II and Alexander I had been. The Emperor's step was not wholly approved of by the Government. At a council of Ministers held in the Emperor's presence, before the decision was definitely taken, the difficulties of combining the Sovereign's work with that of Commander-in-Chief were pointed out, as was the danger that possible mistakes and failures might be attributed to him personally. But the Emperor would not be deterred by these considerations, which he thought were dictated by a desire to safeguard him from shouldering his responsibilities. The war must be won at all costs. He believed that his presence would strengthen the morale of the army. He said to Rodzianko : " I will perish, but I will save Russia." Sazonoff was among the strongest opponents of the idea. So was the Dowager-Empress, who implored her son not to take over the command. The Emperor refused to be shaken in his decision, as he felt that if he did not face these added responsibilities he would be shirking his duty.

The Empress Alexandra Feodorovna had an idea that the Grand Duke Nicholas was unlucky. Intrigues of every kind were rife in Kieff, where the Grand Duchess Nicholas resided, intrigues of which the Grand Duke himself was probably ignorant, but which ill-disposed people attributed indirectly to him. Her Majesty knew that the Emperor's whole soul was at the front, and was convinced that his presence would put new spirit into the troops, and though to her personally the separation was a real tragedy, she felt it her duty to support him : it would mean victory.

On September 4th the Emperor left for Headquarters. In an *Ordre du Jour*, dated September 5th, he reaffirmed his former resolution not to conclude peace while a single enemy was left on Russian soil. These words were now more impressive, for nearly all Poland was in the hands of the enemy. The Empress wrote to her sister :

Nicky will take over the command, General Alexeieff will have the chief work to do, as head of Nicky's Staff. He will guide the whole thing here as the other place [Mohileff] is still further off and then he will constantly go and see the troops and know what's going on at last. . . . It's a heavy cross Nicky takes upon himself, but with God's help it will bring better luck.

The Emperor's idea in taking the command in hand was to make short stays only at Mohileff, leaving the actual command to General Alexeieff, his Chief of the Staff. This plan, unfortunately, was not adhered to.

After the decision had been taken the Empress was calm. She felt sure that the reward would not be delayed and that their luck would turn. She wrote: "Times are awfully hard, in every sense of the word, but one lives, hoping in God's infinite mercy" (August 25th, 1915). She began working again feverishly after the Emperor had gone. More palaces were turned into hospitals; the Neskoutchnoe at Moscow and the Winter Palace in Petrograd. This latter became a huge hospital of one thousand beds and every modern appliance. Thousands of refugees poured into the country. The "Refugee Committee" which had been formed by the Grand Duchess Tatiana became almost a department of State. The Committee was directed by Alexei Borrissovitch Neidhard, a member of the *Conseil de l'Empire*, while members of the Douma, of the *Conseil de l'Empire*, and of the Union of Towns and *Zemstvos* belonged to it. The young Grand Duchess took the greatest interest in it and, young though she was, had quantities of papers sent her every day, which she went over with her mother's help, making notes and writing her decisions. The housing, feeding and general welfare of refugees all over Russia were in the hands of the Committee, the budget of which rose rapidly to several millions of roubles. The money was at first raised by private subscriptions, but the department was eventually financed by the Government. This Committee continued

to work after the Revolution of 1917 under the Kerensky Government.

The crowds of people of every class and condition, flying from their homes, some with a few of their goods and chattels, some quite penniless, even reached Petrograd. They were put by the municipality into every available building. The Empress immediately went to see all the places where they were housed, even the emergency barracks on the island of Golodai, where hundreds of people, men, women, and children, were all herded together, glad to get even this miserable shelter. The Empress visited every corner, questioning the people about their needs, and devising measures to improve their condition.

After the Emperor had taken over the command, news from the front became better, and General Alexeieff succeeded in keeping the Germans in check until winter put a stop to serious military operations. This improvement seemed to the Empress a good omen, and her belief in the wisdom of her husband's decision was strengthened when she heard all the officers in her hospitals praising it.

With the Emperor at Mohileff, twenty-six hours distant from the capital, life at the Imperial Palace became, if possible, even quieter. The whole place seemed dead. There was no movement in the great courtyard. We ladies-in-waiting went to the Empress through a series of empty halls. The Empress gave audience daily, but only to those people whom it was imperative to see, including a few on charitable business. Her latest bout of activity had exhausted her much more quickly than at the beginning of the war, and a month after the Emperor's departure, Her Majesty, though still going when possible to the Tsarskoe Selo hospitals, spent most of the day and all her evenings on her sofa, in a state of utter exhaustion. But no matter what was in her heart, she always had a smile for her children; they always found their mother

interested in their doings. Her face would light up whenever the Emperor or one of her children came into the room. After dinner the Empress and her daughters sat together in the mauve boudoir, the children round her couch. One daughter would play the piano, another would read. Mme. Vyrouboff was nearly always with the party. When the Emperor was at Tsarskoe and had a moment's free time, he would read aloud, generally an English novel, which rested his brain. The young Grand Duchesses never seemed to feel the austerity of their lives, or expect the amusements that should have been theirs at their age. The only changes they had were an occasional concert got up at the hospital for the patients, or a small party at Mme. Vyrouboff's, to which the Empress sometimes accompanied them.

Mme. Vyrouboff had a charming little house near the Palace. She knew how to entertain simply and informally, and invited to those small parties a few intimate friends. Her sister, Mme. " Alya " Pistohlkors (married to the son of the Princess Paley by her first marriage), was generally there ; Countess Emma Freedericsz, Mme. Dehn (Lily), Countess Rehbinder, *née* Moewesz (looking very like the Empress in appearance, though shorter), as well as some young girls, Irina Tolstoy, Daly (Nathalie) Tolstoy, Marguerite Hitrovo, and some officers of the Imperial yacht, when they were on leave from the front.

The realities of war were known to the Empress. She heard accounts of life at the front every day at the hospitals, and from the reports of officers on leave she realised that the spirit that prevailed at the front was very different from that in the rear. The officers from the army were full of hope, energy and patriotic feeling. Those who had been some time in the Petrograd hospitals were dispirited and full of alarming tales.

The hope that the Emperor would be able to make short stays only at Headquarters could not be fulfilled.

He did not return to Tsarskoe till October, and then only for a short time. When he was there the Palace sprang to life. Ministers came and went daily, carriages drove to and fro. He was satisfied that all was going well and was full of hope for the future. When the Emperor left, he took the Cesarevitch with him. He wanted the troops to know his heir. He also wanted his son to see at close quarters what war meant, so that he should be able to understand, in years to come, what the struggle had been and what it had cost Russia.

This was a terrible wrench for the Empress. She had never been parted from her boy for more than a few hours, except for one week on one of her inspection journeys. Every moment she was away from him she was filled with anxiety that something would happen, for the sword of Damocles was always hanging over his head. She made up her mind that she must make this, the greatest of all sacrifices. She would part with her peace of mind and let her treasure go; she was always anxious when her vigilant eye could not guard him. It was for her son's future and also for the Emperor's sake; he was often lonely at Mohileff, and the boy would cheer him up—but the look of anxiety never left her face from that day.

Her war work had little by little shown the Empress many defects in Government machinery. She heard that her ambulance trains were often held up at some point owing to insufficiency of railway lines. There was lack of supplies caused by slowness and disorder, as well as by mismanagement. On December 10th, 1915, she speaks in a letter of a shortage of flour and meat in many places: "though they exist in quantities, but fugitives and troops take all the trains." She did not realise how much all this influenced the political situation of the country. There was no one to give her accurate information on the subject. She never spoke about politics to either

her gentlemen or ladies : the subject was taboo at Court. Rumours of what was being talked about in the capital sometimes reached her, but through the chance words of some of the wounded in her hospitals or through nurses and doctors. Another occasional source of information was Mme. Vyrouboff, who went about a great deal in spite of her lameness. Her father, Alexander Sergueievitch Taneeff, was not only a prominent government official, but also a composer of some repute ; artists, members of society and Ministers of State all met at his house. Mme. Vyrouboff also frequently went to the house of the Princess Paley, the wife of the Grand Duke Paul, who had a kind of *salon* at the time. Unfortunately, Mme. Vyrouboff, although she collected many stories from various sources, was not a very reliable or discriminating informant, and found it almost impossible to separate idle gossip and rumour from sound information. Many who knew that she was the Empress's friend flattered her, and she was apt to be deceived. Anyone who expressed the slightest criticism of the Government was put down as " bad." Mme. Vyrouboff always identified the Government with the person of the Emperor. Any censure of the Government was considered by her as disloyalty to the Crown. The Empress tried to sift out her friend's reports, but they always left an impression, for Her Majesty knew the absolute and wholehearted devotion of her friend " Ania " to the Imperial Family. She knew, too, that the things " Ania " repeated were probably the talk of the town, although, unfortunately, she did not know of how small a section of it.

The death of the Empress's devoted lady-in-waiting, Princess Sonia Orbeliani, in December 1915, was, as well as being a great personal grief, a loss to her in other ways. Though she had been an invalid for years, Princess Orbeliani had the undaunted spirit of the Georgians. She did not give in, though she knew that her days were

numbered, and kept to the last an intense interest in life. When she could no longer serve her beloved Empress actively, Princess Orbeliani did all she could to help her socially, putting her in touch with people who would interest her, and talking to her frankly, never fearing to give her an honest and even unfavourable opinion. She went about a great deal in her wheeled chair to houses where the voices of different parties were heard.

She was a niece of the former Liberal Prime Minister, Prince Sviatopolk-Mirsky. The Empress was devoted to Sonia, and knew her honesty and affection. Her Majesty did not easily change her opinion when it was once formed, but in discussing a subject with a person she trusted she could be persuaded in time to see the other point of view, and even to act on it later. Nothing that the Empress did, or did not do, brought about, or could have averted, the catastrophe of 1917. But had she had wiser advice during the critical years, she would have escaped the unjust accusation of influencing the politics of the country.

Sonia Orbeliani died after a short illness. The Empress never left her during the last day. She had promised her friend to close her eyes when she died, and she kept her promise. Sonia died in her arms, thanking her Empress and friend with her last smile for all she had been to her. The Empress saw to all details of the funeral, fulfilled her dear friend's last wishes, and wrote to all the relations herself. She came to the first memorial service (*panichida*) in her nurses' dress. "Don't be astonished to see us [the Empress herself and Olga and Tatiana Nicolaevna] dressed as sisters," she wrote me, "but I hate the idea of going into black for her this evening and feel somehow nearer to her like this, like an aunt, more human, less Empress." Late that same evening the Empress joined me in the room where the coffin lay. She sat down beside it, looking into the quiet, dead face, and stroking Sonia's hair, as if she were asleep. "I wanted to be a little more with Sonia," she

said. When she left the room, her face was bathed in tears. She felt the loss of the "true heart," as she called Sonia in a letter to her sister, adding "All miss her sorely."

Misfortunes never come singly. On the day of Princess Orbeliani's funeral, the Emperor arrived unexpectedly from Headquarters with the little Cesarevitch, who was desperately ill. He had broken a blood-vessel in the nose, and all the doctors' efforts could not stop the haemorrhage, which had lasted for forty-eight hours. The poor child had had to be supported day and night in a half-sitting posture, and could scarcely speak. The Empress was in an agony. Always calm on the surface, she lived over again in remembrance the hours at Spala in 1912. Again the last remedy—the prayers of the Healer—was called for. The *Staretz* came, prayed for the child, touched his face, and, almost immediately after, the bleeding ceased. The doctors tried to explain the medical reasons for this, but the mother had seen that all their efforts had failed, and that Rasputine had succeeded. The Cesarevitch recovered, and the reputation of the *Staretz* as a man with heaven-sent powers stood higher than ever.

CHAPTER XXII

VISITS TO HEADQUARTERS AND ELSEWHERE, 1916

THE Empress was but rarely seen in Petrograd in the winter of 1915–1916. Her health was very uncertain, and she frequently had to interrupt her hospital work at Tsarskoe Selo. Her cherished plan of going to see the work of the Grand Duchess Olga Alexandrovna near the fighting line, and of paying a surprise visit to her ambulance trains, had to be given up. The Grand Duchesses Olga and Tatiana replaced their mother as much as they could. They went every week to Petrograd, the Grand Duchess Tatiana to preside at sittings of her Refugee Committee, and the Grand Duchess Olga to receive donations for her soldiers' families at the Winter Palace. Afterwards the young Grand Duchesses would wind up the afternoon by going to the different hospitals in Petrograd, which the Empress would have seen for herself had she been able.

The Grand Duchesses represented their mother at the opening of the British Red Cross Hospital, going with their grandmother, the Dowager-Empress. The Empress had taken the greatest interest in this hospital, and had had several conversations with Lady Muriel Paget, Lady Sybil Grey, and Mr. Malcolm, who were responsible for it. It was established in the Grand Duchess Serge's former Palace, then the property of the Grand Duke Dimitri Pavlovitch, and was equipped by the British Red Cross and very well run by English doctors and nurses. The Empress was able to pay a visit to the hospital before the unit left for the front. Lady Sybil Grey, who went with

The Grand Duchess Olga, 1914.

The Grand Duchess Tatiana, 1916.

them, had the ill-luck, after a very short stay, to be hit in the face by a splinter of shell in the trenches near the firing line. She was sent back to Petrograd, and the wound healed well, but there was considerable anxiety felt for her at one time, and the Empress was full of sympathy.

In the spring of 1916 the Empress was able to resume her journeys through the country, though on a smaller scale than in the previous year. These journeys always finished now with a short visit to the Emperor at Mohileff, whither the Cesarevitch had also returned, after a time spent at Tsarskoe Selo recovering from his illness. The sun went out of the Empress's life when she was away from the Emperor, and since the Cesarevitch's last illness that winter her fears for him were never at rest.

The little Cesarevitch had "grown up" considerably through being in the Emperor's constant company. He slept in his father's room, for the house at Mohileff was a very small one, and lunched daily with him and his Staff, talking merrily to the Generals and the members of foreign military missions, forgetting his shyness. He was a great favourite with the officers, and the Empress always begged them not to spoil him, which would have been difficult, as he was a delightful boy. The old Belgian General, Baron de Riquel, and the Japanese military representative, who, in common with all his countrymen, was particularly fond of children, were his especial friends. He also made friends at Mohileff with two little boys, the sons of officers' widows in very modest circumstances. The Empress made the acquaintance of their mothers during her visits, and often sent special invitations to the little boys to come and play with her son, as she felt that he wanted companions of his own age.

The Empress took her four daughters with her on her journeys, and also to Mohileff, where the whole family rejoiced in being together. The Grand Duchesses needed a change from their hospital work. The Grand Duchess

Olga Nicolaevna, especially, had so much overtired herself in the course of the winter that she had grown nervous and anaemic; had had to give up actual nursing and only supervised the wards, though the Grand Duchess Tatiana still worked in the operating theatre. Large supplies of clothes for refugees were always taken on these journeys, which Tatiana Nicolaevna distributed.

For about ten days in the spring of 1916 the Emperor and the Empress travelled together in the south of Russia, the Empress inspecting hospitals and the Emperor reviewing troops. It was a terribly wet time and the Empress and her daughters went about in mackintoshes with well tucked-up skirts. They went over Her Majesty's *sklad* at Vinnitza, a small town near the Roumanian frontier, which had been excellently managed all through the war by Mme. de Hartwig, widow of the former Russian Minister to Serbia. This was the centre of all the Empress's stores and ambulances for the Galician front. Thence they went to Bendery, where the Emperor reviewed the Czecho-Slovak legions, formed from former Austrian prisoners of war, and the beginning of the Czecho-Slovak army; units of which, while returning to their own country through Siberia, were later on the first to help Admiral Kolchak in his fight against Bolshevism.

From Bendery they went to Odessa, where the Empress saw the sanatoria for officers set up in connection with the mud-baths of Odessa, and the first Russian iodine factory. Sebastopol was the next stop. They resisted the temptation to go to Livadia, though the doctors advised it for the Empress. It was, she said, "too great a treat to indulge in during the war." As it was, the trip was a delightful one and did everyone good. The Empress revived, notwithstanding the fatigue, and the Grand Duchesses used to lie like lizards in the sun beside the train at Sebastopol, regardless of their mother's appeals to them to think of their complexions! At Sebastopol, where they had so often

stopped in former years on their way to Livadia, they felt the spirit of war-time. There were scarcely any men about in the streets, as it was a naval town and they were all with the fleet. At night all the windows of the Imperial train had heavy, black curtains drawn across them. Every light was covered. All the town was plunged into pitch darkness, as German cruisers had entered the Black Sea, and air-raids were feared. The Empress and her daughters accompanied the Emperor as he visited the forts above the town; but they saw the fortifications at some distance, as the Emperor did not attempt to infringe the rule that no women were to be admitted inside the forts.

From Sebastopol the journey was continued to Eupatoria, where the Empress had established several sanatoria. Eupatoria was lovely, semi-Oriental, and bathed in sunshine, with glowing flowers overhanging the high white walls of gardens and houses, whose high railed windows proclaimed them to be the residences of Tartars. Eupatoria had not been visited by any Russian Emperor since the Liberal Alexander I, and all the population gave the Imperial Family a warm welcome. The Mahommedans even authorised the *validé* (their name for the Empress) and her daughters to attend a solemn thanksgiving service at the mosque, which no woman ever enters. It was quaint to see the rows and rows of prostrate turbaned men, their shoes all standing before the door. Not a word of the service could be understood, of course, except the Emperor's name occasionally. But their earnest faces, and the Oriental calm and discipline with which they all followed the Mollah in his every movement, made an impressive picture. After the Mahommedans, the Karaim Jews' Synagogue was visited. It was a lovely white marble building, covered with sweet-scented glycinia. A fine tenor chanted the Psalms in Hebrew—it was quite a picture of other centuries and another world.

Those were the lighter sides of the visit. The official

side, including service at the cathedral, and visits to numerous hospitals had come first, and the day was brought to an end by a visit to Mme. Vyrouboff, who was undergoing treatment and staying in a seaside villa. Here all the family basked in the sun and forgot their cares for a few brief hours. Months afterwards, this one day in the quiet little town, with its marvellous sun, was remembered and cherished. They had had a few hours' relaxation and quiet there, and were very grateful for it.

In the summer of 1916 the Empress went several times to Mohileff. The whole party lived in the Imperial train, drawn up in the pine woods near the station. In the morning, while the Empress was resting, her daughters visited the cottages in the neighbourhood, played with the children of the peasants, and gave them sweets and presents. All went to luncheon with the Emperor in the house which, to his amusement, was pompously called "the Palace" by the people at Headquarters. It had formerly been the Governor's residence, and bore traces of the progressive bad taste of all the governors who had lived in it. Such hideous stuffs and such terrible imitation oak-grained wall-papers could rarely have been seen together; but the Emperor had other things to think of, and no changes were made.

All the members of foreign missions were invited to these luncheons, as well as the numerous Generals attached to Headquarters and any who came in from the front. The Empress told me that she always felt desperately shy at Headquarters. She had grown unaccustomed to making a big *cercle* and felt that she was out of her element in such purely masculine surroundings. When she stood in the corner of the room with her daughters, having given her hand to all to be kissed, the bright red spots on her cheeks were sure signs of her nervousness. While the Emperor was engrossed in conversation with some General, she would timidly send one of her daughters to call up someone

to her, though she never had the opportunity of talking to some of those whom she would have appreciated most. Her neighbours at luncheon were generally the chiefs of the British and French Military Missions, at first Sir J. Hanbury-Williams and the Marquis de La Guiche, then General Waters and General Janin. She particularly liked Sir J. Hanbury-Williams and talked quite simply to him. He quotes in his book (*The Emperor Nicholas II as I knew him*) a remark she made to him at one of these luncheons : " War is the passing out of darkness into the light of victory, but victory we must have." This same feeling about victory can be seen in a letter to Princess Louis on December 10th, 1915 : " Oh, how one longs for 1916 to bring us Allies glorious victories and peace ! "

After luncheon the Imperial party would go out by motor, or down the Dnieper on a small steam launch to an appointed spot where the car or launch would be left, and the Emperor and his daughters, accompanied by the most intrepid walkers of the suite, would go off on a long expedition through the country. It was amusing to see some of the gentlemen lagging behind to avoid the inviting eye of the sovereign, for to the stout these walks were more of a pain than a pleasure. The Emperor walked through fields and woods and villages, once or twice even through private gardens when he missed his way. The surprise of a family of small landowners can be imagined when the whole Imperial party of some ten ladies and gentlemen walked through their garden, and appeared unexpectedly in front of the balcony where they were sitting round a steaming *samovar* enjoying their afternoon tea ! The Emperor politely apologised for the intrusion, but was met with rather black looks. Then someone said " It is the Emperor," and all the flowers in the garden would have been pressed on the Grand Duchesses if the hospitable owners could have had their way.

Another time the young Grand Duchesses and I nearly fell into a pond from a raft on to which we had climbed to pick some water-lilies for the Empress, and had to be rescued by the Emperor, though he said he had never before provided Her Majesty with flowers under such difficult conditions.

The Empress stayed near the cars or by the river during these expeditions, with Mme. Vyrouboff, for she could not take long walks now. She liked to talk to passing villagers, and the conversation generally resulted in some private charity to the people who, at first, did not know who she was.

After the walk came tea, and then the Emperor had to return to his work. Sometimes people of special interest were invited, officers returning from the front, doctors, etc., and the suite, of course, were present. After tea, the ladies returned to the train, where the Emperor joined his family for dinner, going back immediately afterwards to his work again. About eleven o'clock tea was served again, in the Russian fashion, when the Emperor would reappear, to read the daily papers and to drink the same number of glasses of tea each evening, while his daughters and the Grand Duke Dimitri Pavlovitch, who sometimes spent the evening with their Majesties, kept up a lively conversation together. The Grand Duke teased both mother and daughters, and the Empress was often laughing and talking as gaily as the girls, infected by the buoyant spirits of the young people. Only those members of the suite who were living in the train, and the two gentlemen who had come with the Emperor, were present at that last meal, and the conversation then was generally quite informal, and the Emperor commented on the news he had read.

It was said that the whole of Headquarters disliked the arrival of the Empress at Mohileff, as they had an idea

Reception Hall, preceding " Semi-Cercle " Hall at the Alexander Palace, Tsarskoe Selo.

The Cesarevitch, the Empress and the Emperor Mohileff. October, 1916.

that she influenced the Emperor much more than was really the case; and every appointment or every change that occurred after she had been there was laid at her door. This was not so.

I myself happen to have witnessed an incident that proves that the dismissal of Sazonoff, which has always been attributed to the Empress's influence and most bitterly commented upon, was not brought about by Her Majesty. I was with the Empress in her *coupé* in the train at Headquarters, when a note from the Emperor was brought in. The Empress read it with signs of the greatest surprise, and, on the spur of the moment, told me its contents. The Emperor wrote that he had decided to dismiss Sazonoff. This was news for the Empress, who seemed dubious, and expressed the opinion that she feared the moment was inopportune.

The last journey that the Empress took was in December 1916, when she went to Novgorod, a town she had longed to visit on account of its numerous beautiful old churches. Now she had no time to see these, as her visit was mainly to the war hospitals. The Governor escorted her round them, and the nobility gave a large tea party in her honour, but it was clear to those who were with her that there was no warmth in the welcome, though the Empress did not realise it. She managed to see some of the old church treasures, and the cathedral, and she went also with her daughters and the Prince Joan Constantinovitch to see an old *Staritza*, who was over a hundred years old, and much reverenced in the town. The old woman greeted her with the words: "Here is the martyr Empress Alexandra." Her Majesty seemed not to hear. She received the *Staritza's* blessing and went away, cheered and comforted; but those who had been with her came back depressed and apprehensive, for they felt the reception was an omen.

CHAPTER XXIII

BEFORE THE STORM

DURING 1916 the political atmosphere in the capital and in all the big towns became more and more threatening. The reverses of 1915 had unsettled the public mind and given rise to a not unnatural anxiety. The Russian temperament always fluctuates from extreme optimism to utter pessimism, and now the blackest view of the future was generally taken. The responsibility for all disasters was laid on the Government, without any allowances being made for the inordinate difficulties of the situation. There was bitter criticism behind the lines of what was done at the front. The revolutionary organisations, which were lying low, blew on the flame in pursuance of their own ends. They particularly directed their efforts towards encouraging attacks on the sovereign. The revolutionary movement of 1905 had been thwarted, mainly by the people's innate fidelity to the throne. There was nothing in the personal conduct of the Emperor that could shake his prestige, so the undercurrents began to be directed against the Empress, in the hope of weakening his position through her. Besides the exploitation of the exaggerated tales of Rasputinc's influence, the most was made of the Empress's German origin. Tales of her pro-German sympathies were invented and assiduously spread. Stories were circulated of her desire for a separate peace, rumours which could gain credence only in the public's total ignorance of the Empress's character. This gossip would never have been listened to for a moment, had not the

whole country's nerves been strained to such a pitch that nothing seemed too wild to be thought possible. I myself was asked in all seriousness whether the Grand Duke of Hesse was not hidden in the cellars of the Palace! And after the Revolution the whole Palace was searched for mythical wireless stations which were supposed to have been used for secret communications with the enemy. Needless to say, all these wild allegations were without the slightest foundation, and I mention them only to show the state of "war nerves" that had been reached at the time. The Empress's sympathy with the Allies and her fidelity to the cause for which Russia was fighting are known to everyone now. Sir George Buchanan, Sir John Hanbury-Williams, and M. Paléologue, all of whom knew her personally, have explained in their books that, even at the time, the stories were not believed by sensible people. Even Rodzianko, President of the Douma, and one of the Empress's most virulent enemies, says that "the wicked idea of treason on the part of the Empress Alexandra Feodorovna must be rejected once and for all. This charge was absolutely repudiated by the commission under Mouravieff, who was appointed by the Provisional Government for the purpose of elucidating this matter in the light of documentary evidence." [1]

I may as well say here that the authenticity of some of the Empress's published letters is in my opinion open to doubt.

An episode out of which a calumnious tale against the Empress was constructed was the arrival at Petrograd, in the late autumn of 1915, of a former friend of the Grand Duchess Serge, whom the Empress had known since her girlhood, Mlle. Marie Alexandrovna Vassiltchikoff. This lady had settled in Austria long before the war and returned to Petrograd, bringing with her letters from her friends in Germany to different prominent people, among

[1] Rodzianko, *The Reign of Rasputine.*

them one to the Emperor and another to Sazonoff. The Emperor immediately sent his letter to Sazonoff, with the remark that it needed no answer; neither the Emperor nor the Empress ever saw Mlle. Vassiltchikoff. The Empress thought that she was trying to create a link between the countries, and considered her action wrong, as she thought that a separate peace would be dishonourable on Russia's part. She said so strongly, and was firm in refusing to have anything to do with Mlle. Vassiltchikoff, who was sent to her estate in the provinces and ordered to reside there till the end of the war.

The Empress was very English in her feelings. Her upbringing and her long visits to Queen Victoria had all fostered her love for her mother's country. English was the language which came easiest to her. The Allies' cause was hers. All her recorded conversations and published correspondence show this clearly, and she rejoiced at the Allies' successes nearly as much as at the Russian ones. Her letters to her sister, Princess Louis of Battenberg, show that she followed with sympathy the movements of the British Fleet and British naval actions, both in the Dardanelles and in the Baltic. The sinking of the *Lusitania* and of the *Portugal* by the Germans moved her to the greatest indignation. The *Breslau's* bombardment of defenceless watering-places in the Crimea excited her nearly to fury. She was always longing, praying, hoping for victory over Russia's enemies. On August 15th, 1916, she wrote to Princess Louis: "How one longs for this terrible war to end—two years' strain. Such awful losses all over the world. But I do not think it can be yet for a long while."

It must be said, to the shame of the upper classes of Petrograd society, that every idle gossiping tale was believed, or at least repeated and spread all over the country till the stories reached the masses, who accepted them as facts. When the stories drifted back to the

Empress they distressed her terribly. How could it be said that she was untrue to the country she loved fanatically—the land of her husband and son? Russia was to her God's chosen land—Holy Russia. Happily for her, she was spared the bitterness of ever believing that the peasants had been poisoned by the revolutionary spirit. The Empress has often been accused of surrounding herself with a German cabal,[1] and it may be worth while to note who were with her all through the war. Her ladies were Mme. Narishkine, *née* Princess Kourakine, Mistress of the Robes, and four maids-of-honour: Princess Orbeliani (who died December 15th, 1915), O. E. Butzow (till the summer of 1915), Countess A. W. Hendrikoff and myself. Her gentleman was Count Apraxine, who was often away looking after her war charities, and lived in Petrograd. She had practically no man in the house between 1915 and 1917. The *Grand Maréchal*, Count Paul Benckendorff, came to assist at her receptions in Apraxine's absence. The Minister of the Court,[2] Count Freedericsz, and Count Benckendorff were among the noblest and most respected figures in society. All their sympathies were with the Allies, as Sir J. Hanbury-Williams and Sir George Buchanan have testified in their books. The Empress's most intimate friends at the time, Mme. Vyrouboff and Mme. Dehn, were of purely Russian origin. These formed the whole of the Empress's *entourage*.

The Empress's committee for Russian prisoners of war was also used as a means of distorting the truth. From the very outbreak of the war Her Majesty had been distressed at the plight of the Russian prisoners in Germany and Austria, and had set up a committee to help them, under the presidency of Prince Nicholas Galitzine, the last Prime Minister, whom she received constantly in

[1] Some German-sounding names at Court are accounted for by the Baltic (Russian) provinces from which the families originally came.

[2] The *Ministère de la Cour* embraced all the branches of the Court administration and its head had the rank of a Cabinet Minister.

connection with this work. She was much disappointed at not being well enough to meet the first batch of exchanged prisoners from Germany and to hear their stories herself, and went to see them later at the Princess Helena Petrovna's hospital. She wrote to Princess Louis that the returned Russian prisoners were

> sad to look at. Clothes in an awful state, faces of those that had no arms covered with crusts of dirt, thin and famished looking, but intensely happy [to be back]. Very kindly treated in Sweden. The Swedish correspondent found those we sent to Germany better dressed and looking well fed. Sad things they told, if one only believes the half of what they say (August 23rd, 1915).

The Empress wrote this from the Emperor's account to her. In the same letter she spoke of her horror at the treatment that was meted out to the Russian prisoners. At the suggestion of the Swedish Red Cross, Russian nurses were sent to inspect the German and Austrian camps, while Austrian and German nurses came to Russia. Both parties were accompanied by neutral delegates. The Emperor of Austria and the German Empress having received the Russian nurses on their journey through Vienna and Berlin, the Empress Alexandra Feodorovna, in the absence of the Dowager-Empress, who was the President of the Red Cross Society, received the German and Austrian nurses in an official audience. The Empress received the Russian nurses before they started, and saw them also on their return, to hear what had been achieved by them. This exchange of visits bettered the conditions of the prisoners in both countries. The Russians in the German camps were suffering greatly from hunger in 1916, and to the Empress's distress, her committee had in January 1916 to stop sending them food, as "they" (i.e. the Germans) "eat it all up." German prisoners of war were not in the Empress's province; she had nothing to do with them. Princess Henry of Prussia wrote to her sister officially

through the Swedish Red Cross to point out the unwholesome conditions in which the German prisoners were working on the Murman railway. The Emperor had the matter inquired into, and the Empress sent an official answer to Princess Henry. To the Princess Louis she wrote on December 2nd, 1916:

> What one says about the Murman railway is untrue. We have just seen people we sent to see all. The German prisoners won't eat cabbage, therefore fall ill more than ours of *Zinga* [i.e. scurvy]. They get paid 60 roubles a month for their work on the line, as they do it well. Out of that they eat for 40 roubles —have beds, huts and barracks. In summer they sleep out of doors. At the beginning, of course, things were not famous as so awfully far away.

She believed what she was told, and had done all that ordinary humanity dictated by having the matter investigated. This was also done in the few isolated cases when the Swedish Red Cross appealed to her personally, although it generally wrote direct to the Russian Red Cross Society.

Already by the autumn of 1915 the relations between the Douma and the Government had become strained, the former claiming that the latter was mismanaging the affairs of the country. Some of the Ministers shared the view that radical changes in the Cabinet were necessary. They considered that the Prime Minister, Goremykine, was out of date in his views, and presented a memorandum to that effect to the Emperor. The Emperor would not agree to Goremykine's dismissal, but, at the latter's instance, he gradually replaced those members of the Cabinet who were not in political agreement with the Prime Minister. This was the beginning of a series of political changes in the Ministry, which was called by some wit in the Douma "the ministerial leap-frog." The Emperor had taken over the command of the army, and was seldom at Tsarskoe. During one of his brief visits (February 23rd, 1916) the Emperor with his brother, the Grand Duke Michael

Alexandrovitch, went to the Douma to be present with the representatives of the people at the *Te Deum* sung in thanksgiving for the taking of Erzeroum. The Emperor was warmly received; loyal speeches were made; and the visit was heralded as the healing of the misunderstandings between the Ministers and the Douma. There seemed to be a promise of unity on the "Inner Front." This did not last, however. The Douma disapproved of the choice of Sturmer as Prime Minister, and the appointment of the Vice-President of the Douma, Protopopoff, as Minister of the Interior. Protopopoff was greatly criticised. Later on the Douma clamoured for a Ministry of "National Confidence"; a responsible Ministry, as in England, was desired. That meant a radical change in the whole system of government, which the Emperor hesitated to sanction, while he was only intermittently in complete touch with his Cabinet. Things seemed to have reached a deadlock. The French delegate, Thomas, said to Rodzianko, the President of the Douma: "Ce qui manque, c'est l'autocratie du gouvernement." This was aptly said. There was no sign of the strong man whom the Empress had always hoped would appear to help the Emperor.

The Empress was anxiously following the course of events. She felt intuitively that things were going wrong, and feared that the governmental difficulties might affect even the war itself, and that her husband's hard work would have been all in vain. What would become of Holy Russia, should there be a recurrence of the events of 1905? She knew that the Emperor was anxious. He was worn out with his double work and was tied to military Headquarters when he felt he ought to be in touch with his Government. He was unable to see many people at Headquarters except the military around him, and he had no time to look about for new elements to be brought to the fore in this time of national danger. The Empress felt that, whatever it cost her, she must help him in this,

bring him into touch with fresh people to choose from. She had always been in awe of the Ministers, and had never discussed any matters of importance with them. In 1915, however, she had begun to know some of them better. The Prime Minister, for instance, whom she called " Good old Goremykine," and whom she trusted, and some of the other Ministers sat on her charity committees, and she had to receive them often in connection with her work.

The Ministers took advantage of their audiences with the Empress, during the Emperor's long absences, to express their opinions to her, in the hope that she would pass them on to the Emperor. In her desire to find people, and realising all the intrigues that were going on, she communicated to the Emperor all the names of people mentioned by the Ministers, and those who were well spoken of in connection with her charities. In a conversation with me, she once said that one of the great trials of their position was that they constantly saw people intriguing against one another, and that it was very difficult to know who was really sincere in his advice. People whom they knew to be loyal to themselves would also, after some time, suddenly become touched with the spirit of intrigue and speak to the Emperor against others who were believed to be the sovereign's friends.

She groped blindly about, unable to verify the information she got, for she did not know the people herself and had met them only cursorily. Her one criterion was: Were the people strictly faithful to the Emperor? Were they loyal? She believed that she was beginning at last to hear public opinion and not only the opinion of the Court. Though she did not realise it, she was often mistaken, and was misled by those in whom she put her trust. Of course, she never really " discovered " anybody. All the names she mentioned to the Emperor were those of prominent officials, who had already at some previous time held some important post. They were often brought to the Emperor's

notice by others at the same time as by her, for the choice among his Conservative statesmen was small.

The Emperor preferred to appoint a man whom he heard favourably spoken of in several quarters and who was also suggested by the Empress, in preference to someone else about whom he knew less; but this does not mean that he was solely guided by the Empress's opinion. When he disagreed he did not like to give a direct refusal to her, but went his own way in silence.

In happier times Alexandra Feodorovna extremely disliked even mentioning anything reminiscent of his work to the Emperor. In 1905, when Count Freedericsz had, on one occasion, asked her to speak of some matter to the Emperor, she was with difficulty persuaded to do so, and when he asked her to repeat the attempt, she burst into tears. She was so ignorant of affairs that she was diffident, and she knew few men of note. She was, as a true woman, always guided by the impression of the moment, and she had now to rely on the few people she trusted. She thought Goremykine a good judge of men; and Protopopoff had instilled into her a belief that he was thoroughly versed in the mentality of the provinces, and was an active and loyal man who would manage to put things right, if he were given time and not interfered with. In her own household there was nobody whose advice would have been of any value.

When the Empress once thought well of a person—in politics as in friendship—he had to reveal himself almost as a criminal before she would give him up. She was extremely conservative in her political opinions. Her idea was that the governmental policy was the right one, and that the peasants (the salt of Russia in her eyes) would not approve of a change; and this was strengthened by hundreds of letters which she got, purporting to be written by the rural population, in which approval of the Government and loyalty to the sovereign were expressed. Even

if the Empress had been told that the letters were not genuine, she would, in her inherent honesty, have disbelieved the story. She also received telegrams to the same effect from an ultra-Conservative "Union of the Russian People." All this convinced her that in autocracy lay salvation.

On October 9th, 1916, the Holy Synod came in a body to Tsarskoe Selo to present the Empress with a *Gramota* (letter of commendation) as well as with a beautiful antique ikon. In the *Gramota* she was greatly praised for her work. The Empress was deeply touched by this. The *Gramota* was very rarely given (it was something like the Papal gift of the Rose), and she was especially pleased at this public approval shown her by the highest Church authority, as she knew what criticism her faith in Gregory Rasputine had excited. The commendation of her work by the Church was believed by her to mean that her efforts to be a help to the Emperor were also rightly understood by well-meaning people who gave her their support.

She was often mistaken in her views: events have tragically proved this. She had no party behind her, and no regular advisers. She acted largely on impulse. She saw Russia from one angle only, and that from a romantic one. Her belief in Russia's great future and her natural desire to preserve her son's inheritance were her only motives. She was no born politician, but a religious woman, highly strung, who struggled through a maze of difficulties and opposition, the full extent of which she did not realise, to be a help to her husband. It was the Emperor's fate to face a task so titanic that it would have demanded a reincarnation of Napoleon and Peter the Great, thrown into one, to carry it through successfully.

CHAPTER XXIV

WARNING VOICES, 1916–1917

THERE were no entertainments at Tsarskoe Selo during the war. A few private cinema exhibitions only were given, of special military films, and on these occasions the Household and sometimes a few guests were invited. Once Sir George Buchanan was asked to see an English war film ; another time M. Paléologue was invited to see a French one. No ladies were asked, except the Household, as the Empress felt too tired to entertain them ; and the men she could leave to the Emperor. In the Emperor's absence, she scarcely ever invited anyone to lunch or dine with her. The Empress profited by meal-times to rest and write letters. The young Grand Duchesses' table was close to her couch. Meals to her were an unimportant matter. She ate very sparingly, and had been practically a vegetarian for years. She, of course, fasted all through Lent, as prescribed by the Orthodox Church.

Only once did the Empress give an official luncheon in the Emperor's absence. It was on the occasion of the arrival of the Japanese Prince Kanine in September 1916. She was very nervous, but as the Prince came specially to Tsarskoe Selo to see her, after having been to Mohileff, and to Kieff to see the Dowager-Empress, she felt it to be her duty, and was as proud as a girl when her lunch proved to be a success.

The Emperor was almost uninterruptedly at Mohileff during the summer and early autumn of 1916. He came back for short spells, both in October and November.

During this second stay a slight stir was caused at Court by the visit of the Crown Prince Carol of Roumania—his second visit to Russia. This was the last time a State dinner was given. It was marked by the first official appearance of the Grand Duchess Marie, the Emperor's third daughter. She looked extremely pretty in her pale blue dress, wearing the diamonds that her parents gave to each of their daughters on her sixteenth birthday. Poor child! she felt that the world was coming to an end and that she was disgraced in its eyes for ever, when she slipped in her new high-heeled shoes and fell down as she was entering the dining-hall, on the arm of a tall Grand Duke. On hearing the noise, the Emperor remarked jokingly, " Of course, fat Marie."

In November 1916 the state of tension in all circles had increased so greatly that it was evident that a serious crisis was imminent. Only the Emperor and Empress did not realise the full gravity of the situation. They believed that alarming reports were spread in order to force on reforms which the Emperor considered inopportune in time of war. He had listened to the voice of public opinion, and had dismissed the unpopular Prime Minister, Sturmer. It was said that the Dowager-Empress had urged this, when the Emperor had seen her at Kieff in November. But Protopopoff still remained at the head of the Ministry of the Interior. He had succeeded in gaining their Majesties' confidence, and said reassuringly that he had the situation in hand. He had convinced the Empress of his absolute devotion to the Crown. He had been in the elective service in the Provinces for many years, before being in the Douma, which had elected him to the post of Vice-President. This, coupled with his well-known Conservative views, made the Emperor trust his knowledge of the country, and think that the action against him was the result of a cabal, trying at all costs to enforce changes.

Protopopoff had known Rasputine for a long time, and so it was said that his whole policy was influenced

by the *Staretz*. Wild stories even were current that, after Rasputine's death, the Empress had *séances* with Protopopoff, at which his ghost was called up. This was pure invention, as the Empress had never practised spiritism: indeed, she often said to me that she considered it wrong to call up "the spirits of the dead, even if this were possible." Gradually the hostility towards the Empress, based on the political *rôle* she was supposed to play and on the totally unfounded report of her pro-German tendencies, crept from the *couloirs* of the Douma to the tribune of the assembly itself. The deputy Purishkevitch made a speech against the "Dark Powers" which, though ostensibly directed against Rasputine, was really a scarcely-veiled attack upon the Empress. Milioukoff followed, quoting a German paper which said that the Empress influenced Russia's politics. Milioukoff was a bitter enemy of the Emperor and the Empress, and spoke strongly, referring to German spies and making insinuations against the Court officials.

People who heard the debate realised that animosity was spreading from the Empress to the whole Imperial *régime*. The instigators of the Revolution of March 1917 were indefatigable in encouraging opposition to the Government. The Bolsheviks for their part were independently pursuing their deadly propaganda against the State. The upper classes, particularly those of Petrograd, had always criticised the Empress. They thought she had ignored them after 1905, during those years which had left her a semi-invalid. They had wanted to be amused, and the Empress had not entertained, as she considered the times were too serious. Her charities and her devotion to her children were ridiculed; her shyness in her rare public appearances was resented as aloofness. The wildest tales were spread; the name of Rasputine was in every mouth; and every story was implicitly believed by the middle and lower classes, who

did not know the utter impossibility of the gossip they repeated. The Imperial Family did not support its head. There was a good deal of personal animosity against the Empress. She was rigid in her ideas, and had more than once expressed her disapproval of youthful follies and other actions which she had quite justly considered wrong.

Sturmer had been succeeded as Prime Minister by Trepoff, whose Government met with little support; the more reasonable elements stood aside. Trepoff was soon succeeded by Prince Nicholas Galitzine, a senator, and formerly a provincial governor. Neither of these was the strong man that the situation demanded. The ship of state was drifting towards disaster. Rodzianko in his memoirs speaks of a tentative offer made to him to accept the Premiership. He says that one of his conditions was that the Empress should go to Livadia for the remainder of the war, which was clearly an impossible suggestion for the Emperor even to discuss.

Warning voices began at last to reach the Emperor. Unfortunately, most of the people who tried to speak to him of the danger of the situation coupled their warnings with attacks on the Empress, and the Emperor knew better than anyone the injustice of the charges against her. Both as sovereign and as husband he had to refuse to discuss the subject any further. Other people seemed to the Emperor to be speaking from personal motives, and he was not convinced that their advice was disinterested. The tone of some of the letters annoyed him. A revolutionary blast was in the air. A letter of this kind was written to the Empress by a well-known lady in society. By accident or design the writer of this managed to hurt the Empress deeply. The letter was meant as an "eye-opener," but was full of bitterness. It was written, evidently in haste, on small sheets of paper torn from a note block, though perhaps the writer did not realise how wounding she was alike in tone and in manner. The

Emperor was prepared to ignore letters to himself, but this to the Empress exhausted his patience, and he was advised to make an example in order to prevent the repetition of such epistles. The lady in question was asked by Count Freedericsz to retire to her country seat for a time. It was, perhaps, an injudicious measure, as it made a martyr of the lady, and people flocked to her house in sympathy. A few of the older leaders of society expressed their disapproval of her action, but the whole incident only created bitter feeling on all sides.

Several members of the Imperial Family also warned the sovereigns of the increasing disaffection in the country. Among them was the Grand Duke Nicholas Mikhailovitch, a well-known historian and a cousin of the Emperor. He was murdered by the Bolsheviks in Petrograd in 1919. The Emperor had received earlier letters from the Grand Duke, drawing attention to the "dangers" of intrigue. He knew his cousin's Liberal tendencies, and that he openly criticised the Government, the Empress and himself, and he had little faith in his advice, astute though he knew him to be. He had disregarded the former letters. He disregarded this one also. But later, when the Grand Duke spoke violently against the Empress in the clubs, he was asked to retire to his country estates.

At about the same time the Grand Duchess Victoria Feodorovna spoke to the Empress of the unpopularity of the Government. The Grand Duchess was restrained in her language, and the Empress did not believe that her cousin's apprehensions were well founded. She always thought that she and the Emperor must know the situation better than anyone; she had the assurance, backed with the authority of the Minister of the Interior, that it was only the desire to frighten the Emperor into granting hasty reforms that caused the spread of these rumours. And did not the letters from the provinces prove that Protopopoff was right?

At last the Grand Duchess Serge came from Moscow. Even this saintly woman was now reviled and slandered by the seditious elements. She was frightened at the hostility displayed towards her sister, and implored her to send Rasputine to his home in Siberia, pointing out that his presence in Petrograd gave credibility to the report that he was influencing the Cabinet, the Empress, and even the politics of the country. But the Empress was obdurate. She would not believe in coming disaster. She kept her blind faith in the millions of Russia's peasant population. They would understand her faith in the *Staretz*, whose bodily presence seemed to her necessary to save the Cesarevitch; to send him away when the child was continually liable to accidents or illness was impossible. Her son's life was at stake, as she thought, and her sister spoke to her in vain.

The British Ambassador, Sir George Buchanan, was among those who at the last hour tried to open the Emperor's eyes and persuade him to avert disaster by granting constitutional reforms. Unfortunately, the British Ambassador had during the last year lost much of the Emperor's confidence. The Emperor had been told that Sir George was in touch with Milioukoff, Goutchkoff, and others of the most advanced Liberal group, personal enemies to the Emperor, whom Sir George, as he says in his memoirs, considered simply as members of the Opposition, in the British Parliamentary sense. They proved later to be those in power after the Revolution of 1917. For this reason the Emperor no longer considered Sir George's opinions impartial, and the friendliness with which both the Emperor and the Empress had always met the British Ambassador, whom they had known as Minister in Darmstadt, had been replaced by more official relations. On January 12th, 1917, Sir George sought audience of the Emperor, whom he says he had personally always liked, to offer him advice on the government of the country.

He says himself that he acted thus against all diplomatic precedent and that he felt like a man trying to save a friend whom he sees falling over a precipice. All the arguments Sir George used had no doubt been heard by the Emperor many times. They might, however, have carried more weight than those of opposing Ministers, if the Emperor had not believed that Sir George got much of his information from the Opposition in the Douma. The British Ambassador also made the grave mistake of speaking about the supposed political influence of the Empress.

These allusions to the Empress wrecked all chances of his advice being accepted, and the Emperor dismissed the Ambassador coldly. I heard from the most authentic sources that, if it had not been for the inadvisability of making changes in the Allied representation during the war, the Emperor would have written personally to His Majesty King George, demanding Sir George Buchanan's recall. After this interview the Emperor saw the British Ambassador on official occasions only, and all their subsequent conversations were purely formal.

CHAPTER XXV

RASPUTINE'S MURDER—THE LAST DAYS OF SOVEREIGNTY, DECEMBER 1916 TO MARCH 1917

THE first to suffer in the coming cataclysm was Rasputine. Hatred for the man who was supposed to be responsible for all the Government's mistakes became a real obsession, even with generally level-headed people. Rumours spread, not without foundation, that he was visited by all kinds of influential people—Ministers like Protopopoff and high officials, and that he used to send short, illiterate notes demanding their help. These rumours firmly established the belief in his hidden power, which was further increased by the way in which Rasputine bragged about himself and his influence on all occasions. The feeling against him became so intense that a plot was formed to murder him, in which Purishkevitch, a member of the Douma, Prince Felix Youssoupoff, the Grand Duke Dimitri Pavlovitch and some others were involved. It was difficult to lure the *Staretz* into a trap, as, by order of Protopopoff, he was constantly guarded by detectives. Prince Felix Youssoupoff, a personal acquaintance of Rasputine, undertook the task and invited him to an alleged party at his house on the evening of December 29th, 1916.

The story of the murder has been so often told that there is no need to repeat it. It is enough to say that Rasputine was first offered poisoned wine, the amateur murderers not knowing that for the poison they chose alcohol is an antidote. Their victim survived what appeared to be a deadly dose. Prince Youssoupoff and

Purishkevitch then took the *Staretz* into an adjoining room and, as he was admiring an ancient crucifix, shot him several times in the back. Rasputine's strong frame resisted even this, and when Prince Youssoupoff returned to remove his body, he got up and staggered across the room. More shots were fired, this time with effect. The body was taken in a car and thrown into a hole made in the frozen Neva. The strength of the current drove the body down under the ice, and it was washed ashore some days later. The *Staretz* does not seem to have been dead even when he was thrown into the water, for the cords bound round his body were loosened, and his rigid hand was folded as if making the sign of the cross.

When the police came to Prince Youssoupoff's house to ask about the firing at dead of night, they were told that a dog had been shot. The authors of the murder lay low at the time; some even denied any knowledge of it. In spite of the Censor, however, the story of the *Staretz's* disappearance got almost immediately into the Press, and caused a tremendous sensation. Though patriotic feeling was supposed to have been the motive of the murder, it was the first indirect blow at the Emperor's authority, the first spark of insurrection. In short, it was the application of lynch law, the taking of law and judgment forcibly into private hands.

No inquest was ordered, on account of the personalities involved. An Imperial order forbade any legal procedure, and the murderers of the *Staretz* went unpunished. Both Prince Youssoupoff and the Grand Duke Dimitri Pavlovitch were, however, exiled by the Emperor, the first to one of his properties, the second to the Caucasian front. The whole Imperial Family signed a petition to the Emperor, asking leave for the Grand Duke to stay in Petrograd on account of his health, but the Emperor refused, making a marginal note on the petition that "no one had the right to commit murder."

After the first horror-stricken moment of the news of Rasputine's disappearance, the Empress showed her usual spirit. She was holding a reception of ladies, and between the audiences Mme. Vyrouboff managed to tell her what had happened. I knew nothing, and went to Her Majesty to tell her that there was still a lady to be received. I heard the door close on Mme. Vyrouboff, and found the Empress outwardly perfectly calm. I told her that Mme. Vera Narishkine (*née* Witte) was waiting, and Her Majesty told me to bring her in. Mme. Narishkine had come to talk to the Empress about a workshop for disabled soldiers, and she notes in her reminiscences the deep interest that the Empress took in her work, and the detailed knowledge which she displayed of the subject.

The body of the *Staretz* was recovered and buried in a piece of ground at Tsarskoe Selo on which Mme. Vyrouboff meant to build a chapel for a home for disabled soldiers. The Emperor, Empress and their daughters, Mme. Vyrouboff and Father Alexander, their confessor, went early in the morning to the funeral. Then the Empress nerved herself to attend the usual numerous Christmas trees for the servants, the escort, and the hospitals, and when Protopopoff came to report an alleged plot to murder Her Majesty, she was perfectly cool and calm. She asked me if I were afraid to drive with her, and this, of course, I energetically denied, but I noticed after this that she seldom took either Countess Hendrikoff or myself. Her greatest fears were for Mme. Vyrouboff, who was almost as much execrated by the public as was Rasputine himself, and the Empress made her move into the Palace for greater safety. But the underlying reason for the unpopularity of Mme. Vyrouboff had now ceased to exist, for she could no longer form the link between the Empress and Rasputine, which had been one of the chief allegations made against her.

Threatening letters now began to pour in on the

Empress herself. She felt sad and tired. In her letters to her intimates she signed herself " an old woman, " and her anxiety for Mme. Vyrouboff is shown in a letter to Countess Anastasia (Nastinka) Hendrikoff in which she says: " Besides everything, try for a moment to realize what it is to know a friend in daily, hourly danger of also being foully murdered. But God is all mercy. . . ."

Rasputine's death had been a shattering blow to the Empress. She had pinned all her faith on him as the saviour of her child. With Rasputine at hand she had been at rest about her boy, whose days she now felt were numbered. Then, too, the *Staretz* had said " When I go, you shall go also," predicting the fall of the Empire. What would happen now?

Shortly before the New Year the Emperor left again for Headquarters. The Empress was too dispirited and unwell to attend even the customary New Year *Te Deum*, sung at midnight on the 31st of December in the private chapel of the Alexander Palace.

The food and fuel shortage was increasing every month in Petrograd. The measures taken by Protopopoff were insufficient, and long queues of people stood every day for hours in front of the bakers' shops. The Empress was still confident about the political situation, thinking it was only a passing crisis, and that in a couple of weeks, when the food transport was in working order, all would be well. At the end of November 1916 Prince Vladimir Mikhailovitch Volkhonsky, the late Vice-President of the Douma, told me that the mismanagement of the food transport was such that by the middle of February the population of Petrograd would be without flour, and that we should have famine riots in the capital which, in the alarming state of the country, might imperil the safety of the throne. Prince Volkhonsky wanted to see the Empress and warn her of the danger, and I gave Her Majesty his message. The Empress liked Prince Volkhonsky personally. He had

been a playfellow of the Emperor in childhood, and had worked with the Grand Duchess Olga Nicolaevna on one of her charity committees. The Prince was, however, at that time Under-Secretary to the Ministry of the Interior under Protopopoff, and the Empress thought it would be disloyal, and savouring of intrigue on her part, to listen to the complaints of the second-in-command "behind the chief's back," so Volkhonsky was never received.

The Emperor had contemplated forming a "Ministry of National Confidence" in January 1917, but in consequence of the great state of ferment the country was in, the plan had been postponed. The year began in an atmosphere of anxiety and gloom. The Emperor returned to Tsarskoe Selo shortly after the New Year, and remained in the Palace until March 8th. He was anxious and worried. Ministers came and went. All the audiences which had been postponed and all the business that had been held over were now dealt with. Physically, the Emperor had changed much. He looked worn and pale, and had grown extremely thin. His kind eyes had a constant look of worry and sadness; there were deep lines on his forehead, and a suspicious bagginess under his eyes, which suggested heart weakness.

His presence was a great comfort to the Empress. Mme. Vyrouboff and Mme. Lily Dehn were also even more than usual with her now. Mme. Vyrouboff was living in the Alexander Palace and gave three small musical parties in her rooms for the young Grand Duchesses, to which the Emperor and Empress came. She invited her usual circle: Mme. Dehn, Countess Emma Freedericsz, with her sister, Mme. Woyeikoff, a few girls, and some officers of the *Standart* who were on leave, also Prince Dolgoroukoff, Duke Alexander Leuchtenberg, and myself. A Roumanian band played, but though the Grand Duchesses enjoyed this change in the monotony of their lives, there was no gaiety in these entertainments. They were weighed down by the gloom of coming events, and all the songs seemed to strike

the saddest notes. I distinctly remember the anxious look on the Emperor's face, and the deadly sadness in the Empress's eyes.

Events were now so threatening in the capital that the Emperor decided to stay at Tsarskoe Selo, and give all his attention to home affairs. He felt that the disaffection in the rear was seriously beginning to endanger the prospects at the front. To win the war was his sole thought day and night, for he knew that on its outcome lay Russia's future as a Great Power.

The Emperor's fidelity to his Allies has never been even questioned. He put faith in the great advance that had been planned for the spring, both in Russia and in France. All through this winter the Russian armies were preparing, and were being reorganised and reformed. It was in connection with this reorganisation that the Emperor was persuaded, against his will, to return to Headquarters on March 8th. It was only after an urgent telegram from General Alexeieff that he decided to go, and then he started with the intention of staying only eight days. I happened to be with the Empress on business when the Emperor came in with General Alexeieff's telegram in his hand. He told me to stay, saying to the Empress: "General Alexeieff insists on my coming. I cannot really imagine what can have happened to make my presence at Headquarters so urgently necessary now. I shall have to go and see myself. I am determined to stay only a week at the utmost, for I must be here."

Was it a plot? God knows! The Revolution broke out during those eight days. Had the Emperor been at Tsarskoe Selo, and had Rodzianko been in direct communication with him, the Emperor would have had the whole machinery of government in his hands. The Revolution, which was at first only a local Petrograd rising, might have been stamped out and all the subsequent tragedies averted.

After the Emperor's departure the Cesarevitch and the Grand Duchess Olga Nicolaevna fell ill with measles, caught from one of the Cesarevitch's friends, who had been spending the week-end at the Palace. The Empress held diplomatic receptions on March 9th and March 10th, warning all those who might have been afraid of infection.

It was the first time for many years that she had received the Diplomatic Corps. Her health had for long prevented her from accompanying the Emperor to the New Year receptions, and often foreign Ministers came and went without ever seeing the Empress. This year she felt stronger, as she had not tired herself so much in travelling; and she received, in a body, all the Ministers and Secretaries of Foreign Missions whom she had not yet seen.

In Petrograd many of the workmen were already on strike. There had been minor riots in consequence of the "queues." The atmosphere was full of thunder. The Danish Minister, M. de Scavenius, said to me, on March 10th, that the situation in the town was very grave. I was alarmed, for in the Palace we had lulled ourselves into believing that no serious rising would take place during the war, and the Emperor's gentlemen confirmed this opinion.

The Diplomatic Reception went off with its usual pomp—Masters of Ceremonies, runners in feathered hats, servants in gold-laced liveries, preceding the Diplomatic Corps. The Empress was very gracious to all, and they went away captivated by her charm. This was the last function, for five days later the Empire of Russia was no more!

CHAPTER XXVI[1]

REVOLUTION, MARCH 1917

IN Petrograd the strike movement spread gradually from one factory to another, the "non-political" workmen joining the seditious elements as the scarcity of food supplies increased. Dissatisfaction with the Government was turning into hostility to the monarchy. The dissatisfaction was openly expressed, and extended to everyone and everything connected with the Court. I myself saw an inscription: "Down with the Tsar!" written on the frozen wall of the headquarters of the Staff close to the Winter Palace. It was removed and appeared again the next morning. On March 4th, as my carriage was stopped in a block in the street, a passer-by deliberately spat through the open window: the hostility was open now.

At Tsarskoe Selo the gravity of the situation was still scarcely realised even by the Household, and not at all by the Empress. So unexpected was the turn taken by events that as late as March 11th Countess Hendrikoff, one of the ladies-in-waiting, left on a visit to a sick sister in the Caucasus—a four days' journey. On the day of her arrival at her destination she heard of the revolution in Petrograd, and rushed back. She arrived at Tsarskoe Selo on March 22nd, and remained from that moment with the Empress.

The Imperial Household believed that these strikes were like previous ones, merely due to the dissatisfaction caused by the food shortage, and that the fresh supplies ordered

[1] This and the subsequent chapters are based on my own notes kept at the time.

by the Government would prevent the movement from spreading. Protopopoff had succeeded in persuading the Empress of this, and also that all the necessary measures had been taken by the police to prevent any serious rising. It was at this moment that Alexei Nicolaevitch and Olga Nicolaevna fell ill with measles. Tatiana Nicolaevna and Mme. Vyrouboff soon followed. As her rooms were at the far end of the Palace, the Empress spent her days running from the sickrooms of her children to that of her friend. On March 11th, though there were street riots at Petrograd, the Empress received Professor Madsen, of the Copenhagen Serum Institute, who had come to discuss the possibility of producing more anti-tetanus serum in Russia. On Monday, March 12th, I telephoned at the Empress's request to Mme. Sazonoff at Petrograd at nine o'clock A.M., asking her to lunch that day. Mme. Sazonoff said that it would be impossible for her to reach the station. There was fighting in the streets, and the Preobrajensky Regiment, whose barracks were opposite her house on the Kirotchnaia, had mutinied, and were firing with machine-guns. Senator Neidhardt, her brother, in whose house she was staying, continued the conversation with me, and when he discovered that we knew nothing in the Palace, gave me an account of the happenings of the night before, and of the mutiny of the Paul, Preobrajensky and Volhynsky regiments, asking me to report it to the Empress.

I went at once to Her Majesty's room. She was still in bed, but her maid, Madeleine Zanotti, told her I wanted to see her urgently, and I was called in. I told her everything Neidhardt had said. She listened with perfect self-possession, only remarking that, if the troops had mutinied, "it was all up," and asked me to send for Colonel Grooten, Acting-Commander of the Palace in General Woyeikoff's absence, while she was dressing. Grooten told her that, though several regiments had mutinied in Petrograd, the garrison at Tsarskoe Selo was still perfectly loyal, that the

events of the past night had been reported at General Headquarters, and that General Ivanoff was coming, by the Emperor's orders, with trustworthy troops, to put down the rioting in the capital. Count Benckendorff had telephoned to General Woyeikoff at General Headquarters on the previous day, asking for the Emperor's instructions should the riots become worse. General Woyeikoff had replied that " according to his information things had been greatly exaggerated." The Emperor was sending General Ivanoff with the " St. George battalion " to quell the rebellion, and did not want the Empress to be troubled by any idea of leaving Tsarskoe unless the danger became imminent, as the Emperor was himself returning. (It was a twenty-six hours' run from Mohileff to Tsarskoe Selo.)

General Woyeikoff was optimistic all through and succeeded, apparently, in imparting his optimism to the Emperor. Their Majesties had so often heard reports of dangerous conspiracies, and so many alleged plots were supposed to have been discovered by the police, that they had almost become fatalists. They were always inclined to think, too, that reports were exaggerated by those who wanted to keep them at Tsarskoe Selo out of harm's way. The Emperor in particular always disliked alarmist reports. General Ressine, Commander of the " Svodny " (composite) regiment which mounted guard inside the Palace, who was under General Woyeikoff's orders, told me in January 1917 that he was very anxious about the morale of the men of the Palace Guard, as revolutionary propaganda had been active among them. The Department of Police had also given him serious warnings. Ressine had passed all this on to Woyeikoff, but, to his despair, his chief had brushed it all aside. It was only natural that the Emperor should disregard the hints of private individuals, when the Minister of the Interior and General Woyeikoff, who were responsible for his personal safety, both assured him that there was no real danger.

The Empress telegraphed to the Emperor on the 11th of March, and was uneasy when she got no answer from him. From this moment, indeed, no communication was allowed to pass between them. She had also written to the Emperor, begging him to make political concessions, the letter being sent by the wife of an officer who volunteered to take it by hand. It reached the Emperor too late. He was never able to act on it or to answer her.

The 12th of March passed quietly at Tsarskoe Selo. The Empress begged her ladies to go on working at the *sklad*, so as to discourage any idea of panic. She herself spent the whole day with her sick children, who were getting worse. She wrote to me on the evening of the 11th that their temperatures were high :

> Olga 39·9 [103° F.], Tatiana 39·3 [102° F.], Alexei 40 [104° F.], Ania [Mme. Vyrouboff] 40·3 [104° F.]. It's normal when high, the rash coming out very strong. Thank God, none have so far complications. Yes, indeed, a heavy time. [The Empress often unconsciously translated from Russian when writing in English.] But faith keeps up. Kiss—sleep well ! A.

The complications soon appeared, however, for Tatiana Nicolaevna developed abscesses in the ears, and in Olga Nicolaevna's case pericarditis supervened. The Grand Duchess Anastasia soon joined her sisters in the sick room, though the Grand Duchess Marie remained well for a few days longer. She was constantly with her mother, acting as her " legs " as she said, running messages—the electric current for the lift had been cut off on the 13th—and trying to persuade her to rest. These days, in which she was her mother's sole support, turned her from a child into a woman.

On the 12th, unknown to her, the question of the Empress's leaving Tsarskoe Selo was discussed by Count Benckendorff and Colonel Grooten. They came to no decision, as they knew that the Empress did not want to go, and no orders to that effect had been received from

the Emperor, who was, in fact, believed to be on his way back.

On the same evening the President of the Douma, Rodzianko, telephoned to Count Benckendorff, ostensibly to inquire for the Cesarevitch, rumours of whose death had been circulated in Petrograd, but really to advise the Empress to take her children away, as the situation was so serious that it demanded extreme measures.

The Empress had said to me that to go "would look like flight," and she was also afraid of the risk to the children had they been moved while they were so ill. On the morning of the 13th, however, she told me that I should "quietly pack my bag to be able to start with them at any moment, should this prove necessary." The gentlemen had on that morning again raised the question of the Empress's departure, but it was too late now. When they asked the commander of the railway battalion if the Imperial train could be immediately brought from Petrograd to Tsarskoe for the Empress's departure, stating at the same time that four hours would be needed for the Court's preparations before they could start, he said that even if he could get the train from the capital, which was doubtful, he feared that in four hours' time events might have so developed that the train would be held up further on the line. Had the Empress and her children started on the 12th or even on the 13th early, in an ordinary train, they would certainly have been able to reach the Emperor at Mohileff, or to meet him on the way.

The Empress was still without news from the Emperor. She could scarcely master her anxiety. The Emperor usually answered a telegram from her in a couple of hours, and she saw in this silence a further proof that serious things were happening outside Petrograd too. Mme. Dehn now volunteered to help the Empress with her nursing, and her sympathy and

calmness made her a real support. Of all the Empress's ladies only myself and the lectrice Mlle. Schneider were in the Palace. Mme. Narishkine was in Petrograd and was not able to come until March 20th, and Countess Hendrikoff had left for the Caucasus. General Ressine, General Dobrovolsky and Colonel Grooten were all the time in the Palace, as were also the doctors Botkine and Derevenko and M. Gilliard. Count Apraxine came at Count Benckendorff's request on the morning of the 13th, and Count and Countess Benckendorff came over from the Lyceum building on the evening of the 13th and settled in Countess Hendrikoff's rooms. The Empress saw the gentlemen and myself several times a day in a "neutral" room, so as to avoid spreading the infection further, and according to her habit wrote me short notes in between. She was always a great letter-writer, and preferred writing notes to the trouble of coming to the telephone. Her friends and the members of her household used to get many such little notes, containing her orders or comments on any events that had impressed her.

Count Apraxine came from Petrograd with a most alarming tale. Nearly all the regiments in the capital had joined the original mutineers. The Government had entrenched itself in the Admiralty under the protection of the few remaining loyal troops, and was having continuous sittings, which led to no result, as the executive power was no longer in their hands. The Douma had ignored the Imperial decree for its prorogation, which had been issued before events had reached their present crisis, and had assumed the direction of affairs.

On the evening of March 13th the Tsarskoe Selo garrison, which had until then refused to join the rebels, left their barracks, and marched out, firing their rifles into the air and at the houses they passed by. They went first to the local prison, the doors of which they threw open, to the delight of its inmates. These were mostly

thieves, as no more serious offenders were kept in a prison near to the Imperial residence. Thence they looted the neighbouring wine-shops. Thoroughly roused, and most of them drunk, several thousands of them started for the Alexander Palace. They intended to seize the Empress and the heir, and take them to the Revolutionary Headquarters Staff at Petrograd. The wild firing that went on gave the alarm to the Palace Guards. These consisted of two battalions of the Combined Regiment, one battalion of the Naval Guards, 1200 strong, two squadrons of Cossacks of the Escort, one company of the 1st Railway Regiment, and one Heavy Field Battery, from Pavlovsk, under the command of Count Rehbinder.

It fell to me again to bring the news of the mutiny of the troops to the Empress. She was in the sickrooms, and when I came upstairs was just crossing the corridor. She was quite alive to the danger, but most painfully surprised at hearing that the Tsarskoe Selo garrison, on whose loyalty we had all counted, had mutinied. She went at once to the children to tell them that manœuvres were going on, so that they should not be frightened by any sound of firing. She then asked me to call the gentlemen, and came down to discuss the situation with Count Apraxine and General Ressine. The Empress could not bear the idea of fighting on her account, and begged that the troops defending the Palace should not in any way provoke their assailants, so not a single shot was fired by the Palace Guards. She threw a black fur cloak over her white nurses' dress, and, accompanied by the Grand Duchess Marie and by Count Benckendorff, went out herself to speak to the soldiers of the Guards. She went into the courtyard and all through the Palace basement, where the men came in turns to warm themselves, telling the soldiers how fully she trusted in their fidelity to the Emperor, and how well she knew that if need arose they would defend the heir, but that she hoped that no blood

need be shed. The scene was unforgettable. It was dark, except for a faint light thrown up from the snow and reflected on the polished barrels of the rifles. The troops were lined up in battle order in the courtyard, the first line kneeling in the snow, the others standing behind, their rifles in readiness for a sudden attack. The figures of the Empress and her daughter passed like dark shadows from line to line, the white Palace looming a ghostly mass in the background. Firing from near by sounded in wild gusts. The mutinous troops had reached the so-called "Chinese village" near the Big Palace. The Cossack patrols reported that they would not venture farther, as they had heard that immense forces were massed in the Palace courtyard, and that machine-guns were stationed on the roof. Neither of these rumours was true, but they served the purpose of the moment, for the mutineers decided that they would not attack the Palace till the morning.

Inside the Palace the night was passed in great anxiety. Firing was heard at intervals, and the Cossacks reported that an armoured train manned by rebel troops from Petrograd was moving up and down the line between the capital and the Imperial station at Tsarskoe Selo. It was rumoured that the rebels were anxious to get possession of the Empress and her children and to hold them as hostages in case things went against them; while further rumours said that they had sworn to murder the Empress.

The Benckendorffs, Count Apraxine and I spent the whole of that night in the Empress's rooms, so as to be near her in case of sudden attack. Our small company had been increased by the addition of one of the Emperor's *aides-de-camp*, Count Adam Zamoyski, who, hearing of the danger to the Empress and her children, had come with the greatest difficulty from the capital, part of the way on foot. He stayed at the Palace until he was recalled by orders of General Headquarters. I must place his conduct

on record, for he came at once to the Empress in her hour of need, though he was one of the A.D.C.'s whom she had known least. A little later Colonel Linevitch, another A.D.C., also came. During the evening the Empress was wheeled in her bath-chair to Mme. Vyrouboff, who was terrified at the sound of firing, and felt that something was being kept from her, which was indeed the case, as it was considered that the agitation of knowing the truth would increase her already high fever. I went with the Empress across the vast dark halls—the electric light and water supply had been cut off by the revolutionaries—and our feet echoed uncannily in the empty rooms. We did not meet a soul; all the servants, who were usually about the house, had fled, only the Empress's personal staff remaining at their posts.

Even now the Empress was thinking of others. She tried to calm old Countess Benckendorff, and in the evening, when the Countess and I were preparing to camp on sofas in the green sitting-room, Her Majesty suddenly walked in, with pillows and blankets from her own bedroom. She went to her room herself, but did not sleep, only resting for a few hours while the Grand Duchess Marie, quite worn out, slept on the bed beside her, and three or four times during the night she came in to us, looking like a ghost in her nurses' dress, her face pale, her features sharpened by anxiety, to share what news we might have of events outside or of the Emperor's movements. On one of these occasions she brought some biscuits and fruit for the Countess—she always had some in her bedroom to eat during sleepless hours. I saw then how oblivious she was to outward things, for she had not noticed that she had not put on her shoes, and came in stockinged feet, as she had been lying down.

At one moment during that night we heard a sudden rush of heavy feet along the balcony outside the Empress's

rooms. The same thought struck the Countess and myself: that the attacking party had forced the lines of defence and had come to lay hands on the Empress. I went to the balcony door, asking Countess Benckendorff to take the Empress upstairs to the children, while I parleyed with the men. To my immense relief I found on opening the door that the men who were hammering so violently were only some of the sailors, who did not understand the geography of the Palace and had come to the wrong entrance on their way to warm themselves in the basement. (It was 22 degrees C. below zero outside.)

The gentlemen spent the night walking about the corridors and going down at intervals to the guardroom. It was known that the Emperor had left Mohileff, and at six in the morning the Empress came in again to ask for news of "him." Nothing had been heard, and we were all seriously alarmed. The Empress grew whiter than ever when Countess Benckendorff volunteered the unfortunate remark: "*Et c'est le premier*[1] *mars aujourd'hui*"—the anniversary of the assassination of Alexander II! The Empress pulled herself together and said: "*Il y a des difficultés en chemin, probablement, le train ne tardera pas à venir.*" It was, however, not until eight in the morning on March 14th that Grooten heard that the Emperor's train had been held up at Malaia Vischera, and was coming to Tsarskoe Selo *via* Gatchina.

It was lucky that the attacking party did not continue their advance. Had they attempted to storm the Palace, they would have taken it easily, for the troops on guard would have been completely surprised. Before the patrol service was organised, no one knew exactly where the attacking party was, nor what were its movements. No plan of defence had been made, and great anxiety was caused by a rumour that the revolutionaries had mounted two siege guns in the "Sophia" (a part of Tsarskoe) and

[1] Old Style.

intended using them against the Palace. Had they done this, the Palace would have been completely destroyed. Fortunately they had no ammunition, though this was not known at the time.

The whole of March 14th passed without news of the Emperor. Outside the Palace the firing ceased. The mutineers decided to join their comrades in Petrograd, there to await further developments. On March 13th the Empress had sent for the Grand Duke Paul, the Emperor's uncle. I was told by the Grand Duchess Marie, who was in the next room, that their interview was a very stormy one, and that the Empress severely criticised the fact that all the troops in the Petrograd military district were reserve men from the adjoining factories.[1] After this one heated conversation, however, the Grand Duke Paul (who was afterwards murdered by the Bolsheviks on January 29th, 1919) was kindness itself to the Empress, and he and his wife, Princess Paley, wrote several times to their Majesties during their imprisonment.

During these first days the only way in which the occupants of the Palace could get news about the situation in the town was in short talks on the private telephone that connected the Winter Palace in Petrograd with the Alexander Palace at Tsarskoe, and the people in the Winter Palace only knew what was going on in the immediate neighbourhood. One or two servants came on foot from the capital—there was no longer any train service. Some of these described the murders of officers and police, which they or their relations had seen or heard of. Others said that the Douma was taking the situation in hand and that things were improving. There was complete confusion, and since no newspapers appeared, there was no

[1] This was not, in fact, done at the Grand Duke Paul's suggestion, but was an order of the General Staff. The workmen from these factories were known to be seditious, and the Staff considered it inadvisable to send them to the front, fearing the spread of their influence. It was thought that they would give less trouble if they were near their families.

way of getting reliable information. A kind of truce had been arranged at Tsarskoe between the soldiers inside and outside the Palace, who had agreed to await developments, for it was reported that two delegates from the Douma had gone to meet the Emperor. In the meantime the Palace guard, who wore white bands on their arms as a distinguishing mark, saw that no one left the Palace. On March 14th the Grand Duke Paul sent the Empress the draft of a manifesto, granting a constitution, which he wanted Her Majesty to sign. Some of the Grand Dukes had already signed this paper. The Empress would not do so. She told me that, though she considered it necessary for concessions to be made, she thought that for her to sign such a paper would look " as if I did just the things that I am accused of doing and do not do. I am *not* the Regent, and have no right to take any initiative in the Emperor's absence. Besides, such a paper would be quite illegal and worth nothing at all."

Late on that same night General Ivanoff arrived from General Headquarters, and asked to see the Empress at 2 A.M. He had been sent in command of the troops that were to put down the rioting in the capital, and had left them at Vyritza, some twenty versts away. He wanted the Empress to give him authority to use the troops guarding the Palace to protect his rear, while he himself marched on Petrograd with the St. George battalion. The Empress replied very reasonably that he had full powers and instructions from the Emperor, and that he must act as he thought best. She could not give orders in military matters. General Ivanoff, as a matter of fact, did nothing at all. He stayed with the St. George's battalion at Vyritza, and did not even detrain his men. After the Emperor's abdication he returned by orders of General Headquarters to Mohileff. The fact that he had seen the Empress was used as another point against her, and she was accused of having plotted with him for a counter-revolution.

The number of troops at the Alexander Palace had decreased. Early on March 15th the *Équipage de la Garde* was recalled to Petrograd, it was said by order of their commander, the Grand Duke Cyril Vladimirovitch. It was a poignant moment for the Empress when she saw the colours that had always been kept at the Palace taken away. Count Benckendorff insisted that this should not be done secretly, and the colours left with the usual ceremonial, the guard drawn up in the courtyard and the band playing. Alexandra Feodorovna had always loved the Navy, and the officers and men of their beloved *Standart* had been much spoilt by attention from the Imperial Family. It so happened that the Naval colours were the first to leave the Palace. The Empress heard the sound of drums and looked out of the window just as they passed below. She watched the scene with tears that no personal danger had been able to make her shed. The loss of the colours seemed symbolic of all the other things that were slipping away.

CHAPTER XXVII

THE EMPEROR'S ABDICATION, MARCH 15TH, 1917— ARREST OF THE EMPRESS

ON March 16th some of the Imperial servants who had been in Petrograd came back on foot, and we learned from them that leaflets, announcing the Emperor's abdication at Pskov, were being distributed to people in the capital. At first no one in the Palace could believe this terrible news. It seemed incredible; and how could the Emperor be at Pskov, when the last that had been heard of him was that he was on his way from General Headquarters to Tsarskoe Selo? Late in the afternoon the Grand Duke Paul came as the bearer of bad tidings to the Empress. Count Benckendorff had already warned her of the rumours reported by the servants, but she also had refused to believe them. The Grand Duke, however, had come to confirm the news, which at first she found it almost impossible to grasp. The Grand Duke was, Count Benckendorff told me, terribly upset and very apprehensive as to the future. The uncertainty of the whole situation seemed bound to lead to disaster. After dinner I went with Count Benckendorff and Count Apraxine to the Empress. We wanted to assure her of our personal loyalty. The Empress received us in her daughters' schoolroom. She was deadly pale and supported herself with one hand on the schoolroom table. I could not think of any words in which to say to her what I felt, and when the Empress kissed me, I could only cling to her and murmur some broken words of affection. Count Benckendorff held her hand, tears running down his usually immobile face. The Empress spoke to us in French

—neither Count Benckendorff nor Count Apraxine could speak English—translating, as she often did, unconsciously from English: "*C'est pour le mieux. C'est la volonté de Dieu. Dieu donne que cela sauve la Russie. C'est la seule chose qui signifie.*" Before we shut the door we could see her sinking into her chair by the table, sobbing bitterly, covering her face with her hands.

Late that same night the Manifesto of the Grand Duke Michael was brought to us by the servants. In this he refused to take up the reins of government before a Constitutional Assembly had decided what the future form of that Government should be. This was the starting-point of chaos. In one moment all the structure of the Empire was broken down. There was nothing to which the nation could cling. What had begun as a military revolt, supported, it is true, by the general discontent caused by the mismanagement of a weak Ministry, led to complete disaster. The strong monarchist element that still existed both in the country and at the front had now no rallying-point, while the revolutionary elements profited by the general confusion to take the power into their own hands.

In one of her notes to me at this time the Empress wrote: "It is a merciful Providence, that fits the back to the burden." At the moment when her fears for the Emperor were most acute, her children's health began to give her the gravest anxiety. Tatiana Nicolaevna was suffering terribly from her ears, and had, temporarily, become quite deaf. Anastasia Nicolaevna also had abscesses, and her ear drums had to be pierced. Brave little Marie Nicolaevna had fallen ill too. During that agonising day she told me that she felt that she was "in for it." I implored her to go to bed, as she seemed to be very feverish, but she would not think of doing so "till Papa was back," and swore me to secrecy as regards the Empress. I agreed to say nothing on her express promise that she would not go out of doors. Marie Nicolaevna could not

wait for the Emperor's coming, however, before giving way. She had caught cold while the rash was coming out, and developed double pneumonia. She lay at death's door, her temperature always 104, and in her fevered dreams she was haunted by imaginary soldiers all coming to kill her mother!

Rumours reached us that the Emperor had left Pskov, where the abdication had taken place, presumably for Mohileff, but everything we heard was vague. I had never seen the Empress in such distress. She did not put her fears into actual words, but she was tormented by the dread that the Emperor had been murdered. She could not believe that, after his abdication, he would be still prevented from giving her news of himself, or from inquiring after his children. She hid everything from the children themselves—they were indeed too ill to realise anything, and as their rooms were darkened they could not see her tell-tale haggard face. At our daily interviews I could feel the force of her suppressed anxiety. "There is nothing I would not do! Let them kill me, put me in a convent—only that the Emperor should be safe and should be with his children again," she wrote to me. Her chief sorrow was for the loneliness she knew he must be feeling at such a moment. These were her moments of weakness. "God will help, He will not leave us," she said. Her faith came to her rescue. Gradually out of that terrible mental suffering she gained a serenity in which she could bear anything, and could be, in fact, a support to all those round her.

There was one night when Marie Nicolaevna was so ill that Dr. Botkine wanted me to warn the Empress that he feared she would not live. I refused to speak to her about it, saying that Her Majesty knew enough of illness to realise her daughter's danger, and I would not cause her extra suffering by putting it into words. I was right in this, for that night was the crisis in the illness and the Grand Duchess's strong constitution pulled her through.

In one way, the children's illness was a help to their mother, for it absorbed her thoughts and kept her constantly busy. On the other hand, had they not been ill, the whole Imperial Family would probably have left the country at the very outbreak of the Revolution. It was not till March 17th that the Empress got a telegram from the Emperor announcing his arrival at Mohileff. Here he was to hand over the military command to General Alexeieff, and to see the Dowager-Empress. Much though the Empress must have longed to be in her mother-in-law's place, she still said gratefully that she thanked God "that he had his mother with him." Later on the same day the Emperor was allowed to telephone to his wife. Wolkoff, her old page, told me that she ran down the stairs like a girl when she heard that the Emperor held the line. Their conversation was short, listeners at both ends preventing any intimate conversation. They only spoke of the children's health, the Emperor merely opening the conversation by saying "You know?" and the Empress replying "Yes." The Emperor was also able to announce his early return to Tsarskoe Selo, which took the greatest load from the Empress's mind. But from this time a premonition of dire calamity began to grow upon her. Little by little news sifted through from Petrograd, as it was still possible to keep up telephonic communication on the private line to the Winter Palace, though the ordinary telephone had been cut off. In this way we heard of the murders of police, and of officers by their men in barracks, of the burning of law courts and police stations by the escaped and liberated prisoners who took care to destroy all the police archives in which their own past misdeeds were recorded. Many private houses had been set on fire —among them that of old Count Freedericsz, his eighty-year-old wife having been carried out only just in time. There was constant fear that the maddened and drunken hordes of soldiers would come to Tsarskoe and vent their

fury on the Empress and her children. There was no sleep for anyone in the Palace during the first nights: no one thought of meals. There were constant alarms when motor lorries full of armed soldiers stopped in front of the locked gates of the Palace. For three days the courtyard looked like a camp. The men, fully armed, warmed themselves at open fires, and field kitchens smoked, where the regimental cooks were preparing the men's meals. It became more and more difficult to cater for them. The provisions in the Palace, as well as those in the Cossack barracks, were becoming exhausted. The water supply had been cut off and water could be got only by breaking the ice on the pond. The situation could not last, and with the abdication of the Emperor the state of siege was brought to an end. When this news was known, it caused the deepest dejection among the faithful members of the Palace Guards. There was nothing they could do now, they felt, but to show their allegiance to the Provisional Government that had been formed by the Douma from among its members. During that night one detachment of soldiers after another left for the capital. In the morning, when the reliefs came round, they found their predecessors gone, and they, too, melted away. Count Benckendorff realised the danger to the Empress if she were left wholly unprotected, and persuaded Her Majesty to ask the Provisional Government to take some measures for the safety of the Imperial Family. The Emperor's A.D.C., Linevitch, who now was also at the Palace, went with a white flag to Petrograd on this mission, but though he had been promised that he would be able to reach the Douma, he was arrested on arrival and unable to deliver his message. At Petrograd nearly all the members of the Cabinet had been arrested, and at Tsarskoe Selo the same fate befell the higher Palace officials.[1]

[1] Prince M. S. Putiatine, Colonel Gerhardi, General Dobrovolsky, Colonel Grooten, and others had been placed under arrest in the Municipal Buildings or taken to the fortress at Petrograd.

Finally Count Benckendorff managed to get into communication by telephone with Rodzianko, and on the 18th of March the latter sent the newly appointed Minister of War, Goutchkoff, and General Korniloff to Tsarskoe Selo to see how matters stood. Goutchkoff came late at night, accompanied by a large retinue of suspicious-looking men, who went everywhere, abusing the servants for working for the oppressors and reviling the suite, whom they described as " bloodsuckers."

The Empress had telephoned to the Grand Duke Paul to be present at her first interview with the representatives of the new Government. The Grand Duke came, and towards midnight the Empress and he received Goutchkoff and Korniloff. They asked the Empress if she had everything she wanted. She said she had all she needed for herself and her children, but asked that her hospitals at Tsarskoe Selo should be kept up and their needs attended to. After this visit, Goutchkoff made arrangements for a guard at the Palace, and at Count Benckendorff's request appointed an officer to be an intermediary between the Government and the Palace. From this time, little by little, the soldiers seemed gradually to cease being guards and protectors and to become gaolers.

Before the town telephone was cut off, some people sent messages of sympathy to the Empress and inquired after the children. There were not many of these inquiries, but the Empress's gratitude for them was extreme. Too many people to whom she had been kind in the time of her prosperity were neither seen nor heard of. Many more did not answer the letters that the Grand Duchesses wrote to them later, fearing to be compromised by association with the Court. Even one of the children's doctors felt it necessary to sever his connection, and sent a message to say that he did not consider himself a Court doctor any longer. How different was the conduct of another doctor, a man who had never attended the Grand Duchesses before,

but who came to Tsarskoe Selo during the worst days and offered his services; and that of the Emperor's dentist, Dr. S. S. Kostritsky, who later came all the way from the Crimea to Tobolsk, at great personal danger, to attend his old patient.

On March 20th, when the trains were running again, Captain D. V. Dehn, also an A.D.C., came from Petrograd to place his services at the Empress's disposal, offering to come with his wife (*née* Scheremeteff, a distant relation of the Emperor's) to live in the Palace. The Empress gratefully accepted this offer, but as Captain Dehn was leaving the Palace he was arrested and not allowed to return.

Princess Obolensky, the Empress's former lady-in-waiting, arrived about this time with the same offer, but was not allowed to stay in the Palace. Madame Woyeikoff and Countess Sophy Fersen also came to express their sympathy. These evidences of friendship comforted the Empress, but how few they were compared with the many who were silent! The officers of the regiments that had formed the Palace Guard were faithful to the last. When they were ordered away, they all came to take leave of the Empress, and some of the Cossacks wept bitterly. An incident that struck us as being particularly characteristic of the tragedy of the moment occurred immediately after the news of the abdication was known. Looking out of the window, I saw dimly through the falling snow a small, bedraggled group of horsemen, parleying in front of the great closed gates. Horses and riders looked dead beat, the animals were hanging down their heads from sheer weariness, while the men still tried to keep up a military bearing. After the conversation had lasted some time, I saw them move slowly away. This was a reserve squadron of the *Chevalier garde* regiment, which was stationed at the Mouravieff barracks near Novgorod, some 150 versts from Tsarskoe Selo. On

hearing what was happening at Petrograd, the young officer in command set off with his men for Tsarskoe Selo. They rode for two days with hardly a stop through the bitter cold, over roads deep in snow. Men and horses were nearly exhausted when they reached their goal. At the gates of the Palace they were told that they had come too late. There was no longer an Emperor. There was no monarchy to defend. They rode away, the picture of utter dejection. The Empress was unable even to send them a message of thanks, though their loyalty was one of the things that she never forgot.

It was especially hard for the Empress, with her inherent belief in the goodness of human nature, to bear the bitter disappointment that she felt in the change of attitude of those she had thought of as friends. But she still kept the conviction that it was not the whole country that had turned, and that there were still many people loyal to the Emperor, who could not show what they felt.

Of the members of the Imperial Family at Petrograd only a few showed any sympathy to the Empress. The Grand Duchess Xenia wrote her sister-in-law a letter full of affection, the Grand Duke Paul was chivalrous and kind, and he and his wife, Princess Paley, offered the Empress the use of their house at Boulogne, in case she should want it. The Empress was grateful for the offer, but it gave her a shock to realise that, in addition to everything else, it might be necessary for them to leave Russia. The aged Queen Olga of Greece and her niece, Princess John of Russia,[1] continued to come to the Palace for as long as they were allowed, and whenever possible they wrote and sent flowers to the Empress. The Grand Duchess Serge was in Moscow, not allowed to leave the precincts of her convent and not able even to communicate with her sister.

On March 21st, the day before the Emperor's return,

[1] *Née* Princess Helena Petrovna of Serbia.

General Korniloff came to put the Empress officially under arrest, by order of the Provisional Government. The Empress received him in her green drawing-room, dressed as usual in her nurses' white overall. When he read her the order of arrest, she said she was glad that the task had fallen to him, as he himself knew what it was to be a prisoner (General Korniloff had been a prisoner of war in Austria), and she was sure he would know what she felt. She repeated to him the request she had made to Goutchkoff about her hospitals and ambulance trains, and asked that the servants in attendance on the invalids might be allowed to stay, saying that now she was only a mother looking after her sick children Count Benckendorff, who was present, said that her dignity was wonderful during this interview. Korniloff told Count Benckendorff that all those who wanted to stay with the Empress would also be placed under arrest and would share the same regulations. Those who preferred to remain at liberty must leave within twenty-four hours. The Benckendorffs, Mme. Narishkine, Mlle. Schneider, M. Gilliard, and myself said we would certainly remain, as did Countess Hendrikoff, who arrived from the Crimea the next day. General Ressine left, as his regiment had failed to elect him as their commander. Count Apraxine asked for permission to stay for a couple of days and then left too, considering that he could be of more use to the Empress if he were looking after her affairs in the capital.

The Empress awaited the arrival of the Emperor with the greatest impatience. He was expected the day after her arrest. The first realisation of changed conditions was felt when she asked to have the usual *Te Deum* sung in the Palace Church for his safe arrival, and the request was refused. The Alexander Palace was now completely "cut off from the outer world," as I was told by the girl at the telephone exchange, when I tried to send a message of thanks from the Empress to a lady who had inquired

after the children. All the entrances to the Palace, except one, were securely locked and sealed, the keys being in charge of the newly appointed "Commander of the Palace," a former Lancer, Colonel Paul Kotzebue, who was in a very difficult position. He was being spied upon by the soldiers, who were becoming very undisciplined since they had acquired their "rights," and at the same time he could not forget that he was one of the officers of the Empress's regiment. He was courteous to the Imperial Family and did his best to smooth matters, but the soldiers were really the masters, and he had to be guided by their moods. The Empress had now the difficult task of explaining to the children what had happened, so as to spare the Emperor when he came. She asked M. Gilliard to tell the little Cesarevitch, while she herself told her daughters. The children were as brave as their mother, and not for a moment did they think of anything except how to help their parents. Though they were still weak from illness, they all mastered their emotion while she was with them. Tatiana Nicolaevna was still so deaf that she could not follow her mother's rapid words, her voice rendered husky with emotion. Her sisters had to write down the details before she could understand. No one knows what they said to one another when they were alone, but when the Empress came back to them, the four girls did their best to cheer her by speaking with joy of the Emperor's return on the morrow.

CHAPTER XXVIII

PRISONERS AT TSARSKOE SELO, MARCH–AUGUST 1917

ON a grey, cold morning the Emperor, accompanied by Prince Vassili Alexandrovitch Dolgoroukoff,[1] drove from the station to the Alexander Palace at Tsarskoe. His car was stopped at the gates. "Who goes there?" was the challenge—answered by one of the soldiers, "It is Nicholas Romanoff." A long parley followed before the gates were opened and the car was allowed to drive up to the private entrance. The soldiers wanted to show by this reception the way in which they intended to treat their former sovereign. The Emperor got out and crossed the hall, where he was met by Count Benckendorff and Count Apraxine. He saluted, mechanically, the score of curious men and officers who were collected there. Very few of them deigned to acknowledge the salute. The men were already beginning to lose their military bearing, and seemed to think that they could best show their Liberal feelings by neglecting their outward appearance. The Emperor went at once to the children's rooms, where the Empress was waiting for him. No one was present at their meeting. As the Empress afterwards said to me, the joy of finding each other alive was the only consolation they had. We, in the meantime, were hearing the story of the abdication

[1] Prince V. A. Dolgoroukoff was a stepson of Count Benckendorff, being Countess Benckendorff's son by her first marriage. He was appointed second *maréchal de la cour* in 1914. Prince Dolgoroukoff, with unswerving fidelity, remained with his sovereign all the time of the arrest at Tsarskoe, accompanied the Imperial Family to Tobolsk, and went with the Emperor and Empress to Ekaterinburg. On arriving at that town, he was not allowed in the Ipatieff house, but was taken to prison, where it is said he was shot in July 1918.

from Prince Dolgoroukoff. When the news from Petrograd became alarming, a return to the capital was decided on. The Emperor had heard from Rodzianko, the President of the Douma, that the last moment had been reached at which concessions by the Government could be of any use. With the usual slowness of Court mechanism the Emperor's departure was delayed by long preparations till the night of 13/14th March, and much valuable time was lost. The Emperor did not want his movements to interfere with the planned movements of munition trains bound for the front, so that instead of following General Ivanoff's military trains, the Imperial train had taken the Bologoe-Vischera route, and was not even preceded by the usual pilot engine. At Vischera crowds of railway workmen with dark and hostile faces hung about the station, and the engineers announced that the line farther on was in revolutionary hands. The Imperial train had then to turn back and try to reach Tsarskoe *via* Pskov-Gatchina. At Pskov the Emperor was held up by General Russki, who told him of the coming arrival of delegates from the Douma. When the Emperor gave him a telegram to send to Rodzianko, granting wide concessions, he held it back, and when the members of the Douma, Goutchoff and Schulgin, assured the Emperor that the only salvation for the country lay in his abdication in favour of the heir, Russki vehemently supported them. The Emperor, who was not allowed to communicate with his Cabinet, asked all the chiefs of the Army Corps for their opinion. All, even the Grand Duke Nicholas Nicholaevitch, telegraphed advising his abdication. At first the Emperor wished, as they had suggested, to abdicate in favour of the Cesarevitch Alexei, but after a conversation with Doctor Fedoroff about the Cesarevitch's health, he changed this abdication in favour of his brother. The Doctor swept away the Emperor's illusions about his son's health. He told him that his illness was incurable,

and that, though he might live many years, he would always be subject to attacks, and would have to take the greatest precautions. It was clear to the Emperor that his son would not be the strong, vigorous sovereign who could lead Russia out of her troubles. Fedoroff also said that it was most improbable that the new *régime* would allow the Cesarevitch to remain in his parents' care. Who would be the Regent and how would he train the boy? To save Russia, to his mind the only thing that mattered, the Emperor decided to pass on his rights to the Grand Duke Michael Alexandrovitch, a man in the prime of life, whose whole early training had been planned with a view to his possible succession. The Act of Abdication was changed in this sense by the Emperor himself, and he sent a telegram to "the Emperor Michael Alexandrovitch," assuring him of his brotherly love and loyalty. This telegram and the beautiful *Ordre du Jour* in which he took leave of his army—it concluded with the words, written in his own hand: "God help Russia"—were suppressed. They might have aroused some inconvenient feelings of loyalty. As it was, everyone was stunned by the Emperor's decision, and the members of the Douma did not know how to adjust themselves to the prospect of a new Emperor in the person of the Grand Duke Michael. The Grand Duke, however, hesitated to be proclaimed Emperor without an expression of the people's will. This was the first step towards the republic, a step which many of those who had deposed the Emperor probably had not foreseen.

After his abdication the Emperor returned from Pskov to Mohileff, where he handed over the military command to General Alexeieff. Prince Dolgoroukoff gave a terrible account of the days there. The Emperor had had a lingering hope of being able to serve his country as a soldier, but this was, of course, quite out of the question. His position was an impossible one. Many showed their

personal loyalty, but many more avoided him and shunned the faithful ones as if they had had the plague. The Dowager-Empress arrived from Kieff, and stayed with the Emperor. At Count Freedericsz's suggestion, the members of the suite still dined with the Foreign Missions, the heads of which showed the greatest courtesy to the Emperor. Led by General Sir John Hanbury-Williams, the chiefs of the Allied Missions proposed to escort the Emperor to Tsarskoe Selo, and thence *via* Finland to the frontier. The Emperor would not agree to this. His children were too ill to be moved, and he would not leave without his family. He hoped that when things had become quieter they would all be allowed to live in Russia. The idea of leaving his country distressed him as much as it did the Empress. She would not entertain the idea for a moment, and entirely refused to consider departure for England when it was suggested to her as a possibility by General Korniloff on March 21st. The Empress would not even listen to a suggestion made a few days later by Mme. Narishkine that, if their Majesties were again given the opportunity of going, they should accept, leaving the children with her and Count Benckendorff, and that after their recovery Count Benckendorff and I should take the children to join their parents.

The offer to leave Russia was never made. The unwillingness of the Emperor and Empress to agree to this suited the Provisional Government. To let them go, they would have had to fight against the "Soviet of Workmen's Deputies," who had their own council in the very building of the Douma, and over which the Government very soon began to lose control. The various conversations between Sir George Buchanan and Milioukoff, the Russian Minister for Foreign Affairs, on the subject of their departure were never heard of by the Imperial Family, nor did a telegram from King George to the Emperor ever reach him. Sir George Buchanan

had given it to Milioukoff, who had not forwarded it. He told Sir George that it might be misconstrued—the Russian version, which was circulated at the time, was that it was "wrongly addressed"; the King of England had addressed the telegram to the Emperor of Russia. The only communication that the Emperor and Empress ever had from any of their relations abroad was a message which Kerensky gave the Empress from Queen Mary, inquiring after her health. During the first weeks after the Revolution they were cut off completely from the world. Scraps of news were gathered from time to time by the doctors or tutors, who were looked upon benevolently by the guards, and who used sometimes to exchange a few words with the less hostile officers. Later, when the newspapers appeared again, it was difficult to grasp what was really going on, owing to the distorted angle at which everything was seen by the Russian Press. The Emperor and Empress never knew if they still had any supporters in the country or abroad. The Empress still believed that the nation as a whole was faithful to the monarchy. She *could not* believe that the upheaval was general, and always trusted to a sudden miraculous change and to the people clamouring for an Emperor. It was only step by step, as their position became more difficult, as humiliations increased through the long months of imprisonment, that she realised the ever-growing danger and the hopelessness of evading it.

The first days after the Emperor's return to Tsarskoe were, to the Empress, a calm after the storm. "He" was back at last, and she felt that things must improve. Count Benckendorff was afraid of domiciliary visits and legal proceedings against the Emperor. He saw the increasing hostility and lawlessness of the soldiers and, as a soldier himself, understood that the officers were fast losing control over their men. At his advice the Empress destroyed those parts of her private correspondence which

she felt were too sacred, for sentimental reasons, to be seen by prying eyes. These were her father's letters, Queen Victoria's letters, and the Emperor's letters written at the time of their engagement. She told me that she left the rest of her correspondence unburnt for the Emperor's sake. Although she dreaded the idea of others' eyes seeing the intimate letters they had written as husband and wife, she felt it her duty not to destroy them, for, should the Emperor be tried as Louis XVI had been, the letters would be a proof that his thoughts had always been for the welfare of his country. The Emperor burnt nothing at all. He was the tidiest, most systematic of men, and all his papers were in perfect order, classified, and with annotations. His daughters told me that whenever he went to his writing-table he could find what he wanted at once. Count Benckendorff spoke several times of the desirability of accepting the offer of going abroad, should it be made again. He foresaw clearly that the present moment was only a lull in the storm, and knew that there was no example in history of a deposed sovereign being able to remain in his country. The Empress once or twice, very unwillingly, spoke to me of Count Benckendorff's views. She said it was such a nightmare to her that she prayed daily against it. Still she questioned me tentatively about Norway, saying that if they should be "dragged" away, she would prefer to go there. The climate would suit the Cesarevitch, and they would be able to live there quite quietly and unseen.

Prince Dolgoroukoff, who returned with the Emperor, had now been added to our permanent company. Colonel Narishkine, A.D.C. to the Emperor, who was expected to come on March 22nd, never appeared.[1] Mme. Vyrouboff's

[1] Those who stayed with the Imperial Family during the first five months of their imprisonment were Count Benckendorff, Mme. E. A. Narishkine (till May 27th, 1917, when she fell ill and left), Countess A. W. Hendrikoff, Mlle. E. A. Schneider, M. Gilliard, Doctors Botkine and Derevenko, and myself. Count Apraxine had left on March 26th.

parents, who had been with her during her illness, were made to leave in March.

During the first weeks the Emperor was allowed to go out for a short daily walk with Prince Dolgoroukoff in the Palace grounds. A detachment of soldiers with fixed bayonets accompanied them on these thirty-minute outings. The Emperor generally got exercise by shovelling away the snow, as he did not care to walk round and round the limited space that was allotted to him. The Empress never went out at all. She had not walked for years, and to do so now under escort of an armed guard would have been very trying for her. The Imperial Family spent the rest of each day in their rooms. The ladies and gentlemen of the Household squeezed into the rooms of the maids-of-honour, where they arranged a common sitting-room and dining-room. The Imperial Family had their meals with the invalids, who were now recovering, and Mme. Dehn, the Benckendorffs, Prince Dolgoroukoff, and we two ladies-in-waiting had ours together, the doctors and M. Gilliard being by themselves. In the evening the Emperor and Empress used to go and see Mme. Vyrouboff in her sick-room, and then came to spend an hour with us. Those evenings were unspeakably sad. The Empress was growing thinner and thinner, and was terribly aged in appearance. She sat almost in silence. No one dared to touch on the events of the day. It would have been impossible to discuss with the Emperor the anxiety that everyone felt for him, knowing the butchery of officers that was going on at Cronstadt and Vyborg, and hearing, occasionally, the talk of the soldiers in the guard-room who were clamouring that he should be tried or sent to Cronstadt. Armoured lorry-loads of soldiers still kept coming from Petrograd. These were generally successfully turned off by the guard, who considered the prisoners were safe enough in their hands. But one particular batch included members of the soldiers' "Soviet," and refused to go without having

assured themselves, by the evidence of their own eyes, that the Emperor was sufficiently guarded, and need not be taken by them to a safer place. Their attitude became threatening, and they were ready to use their machine-guns. In order to avoid violence, the Emperor was asked to pass through the corridor where they were massed so that they should see him. They were pacified by this and finally went away. On April 3rd the Palace had its first visit from the rulers now in power. Kerensky, the Minister of Justice, came to see the State prisoners. He wanted to satisfy himself that the orders of the Government were being rigorously carried out. The arrival of the representative of the new Government created great excitement among the guard and the servants, many of whom fawned obsequiously on him. Kerensky went through the whole of the Palace, accompanied by a heterogeneous suite, which followed him step by step, perhaps to control his actions. They were a mixed and ill-favoured crowd, some dressed like well-to-do workmen in black shirts, with sheepskin caps pulled well back on their heads, and some soldiers and sailors, the latter with hand-grenades, daggers and revolvers disposed all over their persons. They strutted about the Imperial apartments, investigating everything and talking loudly. Kerensky himself was a medium-sized, thin, fair man, with a pasty, greenish complexion, greenish eyes with a shifty expression in them, and a loose-lipped mouth. He also wore the black blouse of a workman, but had removed his cap. He spoke in short, abrupt sentences, and stood in a Napoleonic pose with his hand thrust into the breast-pocket of his coat. His manner was commanding with everyone, but when he came into the Emperor's room he was evidently ill at ease, though his speech became louder. He had brought a new commander of the Palace, in the person of Colonel Korovitchenko, appointed to replace Kotzebue, of whom the soldiers had become suspicious, as he had been several times to call on Mme. Vyrouboff. Korovitchenko

immediately proceeded to the guard-room, where he drew up a series of rules and regulations for the prisoners' *régime*. Meanwhile Kerensky cross-questioned the Emperor about different matters in connection with orders given from Headquarters to the Ministers of the late Government. The Emperor replied to all the questions, evidently to Kerensky's satisfaction. At the close of the conversation, he inquired after the children's health, and did not insist on seeing the Grand Duchesses when he heard they were still in bed. The Emperor told me later that Kerensky was obviously nervous at the beginning of the interview, speaking fast in jerky sentences, and shaking and flourishing a paper-cutter which he had picked up from the table, but that at the end he quieted down and was coldly civil. He went through all the Imperial rooms, except the bedrooms, and then to the part of the house where the suite lived. Here he was joined again by his staff, who had spent the time while he was with the Emperor in reviling the servants for waiting on the "Tyrants." After seeing the rooms of the Household, Kerensky, accompanied by Colonel Korovitchenko and Count Benckendorff, went to Mme. Vyrouboff. She had only just recovered from her bad attack of measles and was still very weak. Her presence in the Palace had been a source of continual anxiety to the Household, on the Empress's account, for the soldiers not only openly attacked her but coupled the Empress's name with hers, and were continually threatening to murder first Mme. Vyrouboff and then the Empress. They had occasionally become so violent, excitedly accusing Mme. Vyrouboff of high treason and of connivance with Rasputine, and saying that her presence in the Palace meant that "plots" were still going on, that Count Benckendorff had tried to persuade the Empress to have her friend quietly removed to a hospital outside the Palace, where her parents could look after her. The Empress would not hear of her being taken away. She believed that she would be safer in the Palace,

and that to abandon her would be to give her up to the wolves, and she scorned the idea that her friend's presence could be dangerous. Notwithstanding Mme. Vyrouboff's state of health, Kerensky had her arrested, and ordered her immediate transfer to the fortress of SS. Peter and Paul at Petrograd. With difficulty permission was obtained for her to say goodbye to the Empress. They met for a few moments in Mlle. Schneider's room, in the presence of Colonel Korovitchenko and Colonel Kobylinsky. It was a tragic parting, and the loss of her friend seemed to the Empress one more of the crosses that she had to pray for strength to bear. Doctor Botkine had been asked, at the Empress's request, if he thought she could be moved, and had said he believed her health would stand it. Mme. Lily Dehn helped the trembling and crippled woman to pack her few belongings and went with her. She also was arrested on her arrival in the capital, and, though she was very soon set free, she found that she was not allowed to return to the Palace. Ania Vyrouboff was treated with the utmost severity during the long months of her imprisonment. No proof could be found that she had played any part in politics, and she was finally released.

Kerensky's visit and the cross-examination to which he had subjected the Emperor seemed to Count Benckendorff the preliminaries of a trial. He drew the Emperor's attention to this possibility, and asked him to think about the person to whom he would, in such a case, wish to entrust his defence. The Emperor chose Senator Koni, a well-known lawyer, whose name first came into prominence when, as a young man, he had defended Vera Zassoulitch, a revolutionary who was tried for political murder, and in whose defence he gained a great reputation. The Emperor was never tried, but had he been, the beginning and end of Koni's career would have been in curious contrast.

On April 8th, five days after his first visit, Kerensky came again. He sent for Mme. Narishkine, and, after

a few questions, told her that it would be necessary to part the Emperor and Empress, as the extreme elements were loud against the Empress's " counter-revolutionary " influence, and with the trials of the late Ministers in progress he did not wish their Majesties to be in communication with each other. His first idea was to leave the Emperor with the children, and to take away the Empress; but Mme. Narishkine succeeded in dissuading him from this, pointing out that it would be cruelty to part the sick children from their mother (Olga, Marie and Anastasia Nicolaevna were still in bed). He finally agreed to let the Empress stay with the children upstairs, while the Emperor was moved to another floor. Their Majesties were to meet twice a day only at meals (the presence of an officer of the guard was stipulated at first, but this was soon dropped), and they had to give their word of honour not to touch on any political subject during that time. Their Majesties had to submit to this separation, which lasted till the inquiry into the Empress's conduct was dropped by the Government, nothing having been proved against her.

Kerensky's third visit took place on April 25th, when he came to examine the Emperor's papers. The Emperor silently handed over to him the key of his writing-table, and Kerensky, seeing that the amount of material to go through would involve several hours' work, entrusted the task to Colonel Korovitchenko (who was a lawyer) and to Colonel Kobylinsky. The Emperor did not ask that either he or his gentlemen should be present at these proceedings, so the two colonels did their work alone. Meanwhile, Kerensky asked for an interview with the Empress, and cross-examined her about the political *rôle* that she was accused of having played. He examined her minutely, and the precision and straightforwardness of her answers seemed to satisfy him. The Emperor spent the time of this examination pacing up and down an adjoining room. Tatiana Nicolaevna told me that he seemed ready to rush

in to his wife's assistance, should any sounds of a heated discussion come from the room next door. The time seemed endless to father and daughter, who both had at the back of their minds the fear that if some chance word should not please her accuser, the Empress might be arrested and taken away. However, when Kerensky came out, he greeted the Emperor with the words " Your wife does not lie." The Emperor quietly replied that he had always known it.

The painful situation created by their separation lasted for about a month. During that time the Emperor and Empress scrupulously respected their promise and never had any word in private. This was the first time that orders were actually enforced, and it was particularly trying on account of the children's illness ; but it was pointed out to them, that, were Kerensky unable to give the assurance that he had effectively separated the Imperial couple, it might have been insisted that one or other of them should be taken to a fortress, the nightmare that oppressed them during the whole of their captivity.

During the time of her separation from the Emperor the Empress lay nearly all day in her daughters' rooms : the inevitable physical collapse had come. The Emperor spent his time reading, except for his short daily outings and meals. The Grand Duchess Tatiana sat with him in the evenings, and he read aloud to her while she worked, or they sorted his books and photographs. " To learn blind submission " was the hard task of the Russian Autocrat and his family during nearly sixteen months' imprisonment. Even at Tsarskoe it was submission to orders given with scarcely a semblance of legality, as the soldiers' conduct was not in accordance with instructions from the Government, but was their own conception of the right treatment of State prisoners. But the lesson was learnt with wonderful courage and dignity—the children following the example of their parents. The Provisional Government, by the

mouth of Kerensky, had laid down the rules to be followed in the Palace, but they had no time to see how their orders were carried out.

The abolition of the death penalty—one of the first of the new Government's decrees—certainly saved the Emperor's life. At the first moment, the extremists, drunk with power, would have gone to any lengths in their desire for judicial vengeance against the head of the Tsarist *régime*. The Ministers spent their days making endless speeches, which were listened to by admiring crowds, shouting themselves hoarse with cries of "Long live liberty!"

The guard of the Palace now consisted of the first, second and fourth Regiments of Rifles, to which later a detachment of the third Regiment of Rifles was added. These had previously done service at the fortress, and wanted to enforce full prison regulations in the Palace. It was they who first introduced a ten-minutes' walk, and who saw that all the things brought for the family's use were minutely examined. All their officers, most of them very young, had been elected by the men and were, in consequence, treated as completely negligible. The second and third Rifles were particularly hostile, and every time these two regiments were on duty some incident occurred, some new rule was enforced or some fresh thing was forbidden. The soldiers who, barely a month before, had been spick and span, perfectly disciplined troops, had degenerated into an untidy, undisciplined horde. They were slovenly in their dress, their crushed caps were set awry on huge mops of unkempt hair, their coats were half-buttoned, and their nonchalant manner of performing their military duties was a continual irritation to the Emperor. They lolled out of the guard-room, and sat about smoking and reading papers. One day the Grand Duchess Tatiana and I saw from the window that one of the guards on duty in front of the

Palace, struck evidently with the injustice of having to stand at his post, had brought a gilt armchair from the halls and had comfortably ensconced himself therein, leaning back, enjoying the view, with his rifle across his knee. I remarked that the man only wanted cushions to complete the picture. There was evidently telepathy in my eye, for when we looked out again, he had actually got some sofa cushions out of one of the rooms, and, with a footstool under his feet, was reading the papers, his discarded rifle lying on the ground! Others, to while away the time, shot at everything they fancied, and the tame deer and swans of the park came to an untimely end. Every man considered himself his own master and free to roam about the Palace, the officers' requests that they should remain in the guard-room being generally made in vain. Protests from our side would have been still more unavailing. The soldiers entered any room they fancied on the plea of "going their rounds." Once a whole band, swearing and talking loudly, went in the early morning into the Cesarevitch's room, and were with difficulty prevented, by Prince Dolgoroukoff, from entering the Empress's room while she was dressing. As a vexatious measure, a sentry had been placed just outside the window of her dressing-room, so that the Empress had to use the greatest ingenuity to find a corner where she was away from his watchful eye. All this minor unpleasantness had to be borne in silence, in order not to provoke discussion that always gave rise to stricter measures. As an example of our utter helplessness in the soldiers' hands, I can mention an incident that happened to me. One night I was awakened by a stertorous breathing in my bedroom. By ill luck the light near my bed was out of order. (After the first days of the Revolution the electric current had been restored.) I asked who was there, heard stealthy steps, and the door of my dressing-room closing. I jumped out of bed, ran to the dressing-room,

and switched on the light. The room was empty, but when I opened the door I saw the figure of a soldier disappearing round the corner of the corridor. Next morning I discovered that every small gold and silver thing in my sitting-room had been stolen. The man had evidently meant to take also my watch and rings, which lay on my dressing-table, and must have made some noise which woke me. The gentlemen's boots, standing outside their doors, were also stolen, but we could not complain, as we should undoubtedly have been taken to prison for casting aspersions on the honesty of the revolutionary army. I was an ex-Baroness and ex-lady-in-waiting to the ex-Empress (as a letter addressed to me said), and my word would never be taken against that of a free citizen.

The Household, though they had shared the arrest of the Imperial Family at their own wish, were subject to the same rules, and were allowed to see no one, though later, for special reasons, one or two exceptions were made. Prince Dolgoroukoff and Countess Hendrikoff were allowed to see their brothers before they went to Siberia, and I was allowed to see my mother, and later my father after my mother's death. These meetings took place in the guard-room. Both parties were brought in by soldiers with fixed bayonets, and they, with a member of the Soviet, were present at the short interview. Special permission could be given to the suite to telephone from the guard-room, a soldier standing by to listen to the conversation. The servants, who were considered free, were not allowed to go out, though they might see their families on certain fixed days standing at some distance from them outside the Palace gates. Petty humiliations and incidents were often harder to bear than more serious hardships. Every parcel that came was opened and closely examined by the soldiers, the officer on guard and the commandant, and, after this, was delivered or not according to the mood of the moment. The guards were in deadly fear of

conspiracy, but these minute examinations were sometimes ridiculous. For instance, a tube of tooth paste would be ripped open, though it came direct from the shop. Our *youghourt* generally had the trace of a finger that had stirred it up, and chocolates were bitten open. The delivery of the laundry was a function at which all the guard assisted in a body.

The Imperial Family were allowed to keep their own cook, who daily received the necessary ingredients for the simple meals which were brought in to them by the soldiers. They were at first even forbidden fruit, which was a luxury that prisoners could not be allowed. All the plants in the rooms had been taken away for the same reason, and it was pathetic to see the joy of the poor Empress in summer, when one of the maids would come back from a walk in the grounds, bringing her some daisies or perhaps, as a great treat, a branch of lilac. The ladies' maids had the privilege, as free citizens, of being taken for walks by the soldiers beyond the enclosure where the Imperial Family and the Household were penned in. The rules varied. On one day one thing was forbidden, another day something else. Once, one evening in the heat of summer, when the Grand Duchess Tatiana and I sat on the window-sill of my room on the second floor, reading aloud and trying to get a little air (it was after five, and we were never allowed out a second time), a sudden voice outside bellowed "Take away your mugs (*roja*), or I shall fire." We looked out in surprise, and saw the sentry pointing his rifle at us, shouting furiously "Don't you know that you must shut the window?"

"But it is always allowed," I said, "it is so stifling."

"Obey orders!" he shouted, "or I shall fire."

We closed the window, for we knew that he was quite capable of firing to frighten us and might well have killed us in his unskilled handling of his gun.

Church services had been allowed on Saturday evenings

and Sunday, but were always made the occasion of long discussions, terminating in violent abuse, the echoes of which were heard, as the guard-room was under the Empress's bedroom. After some time, the guard insisted that "their prisoners" should be handed over daily by the leaving detachment to the replacing one. They were very insistent on this, but Count Benckendorff managed to compromise. Every day, when the guard was changed, the old and the new officers came to their Majesties' rooms to be "presented" to the Emperor and Empress and all the children. A distressing incident occurred on one of these occasions, when one of the officers refused to take the hand that the Emperor stretched out in greeting, saying that he was of the people and would not lower himself to take the hand of a tyrant. These wilful humiliations and insults were intensely painful to those officers who were not extremists, and they did everything in their power not to be sent on guard at the Palace, doing their best to get transferred to the front as soon as they could. This meant, unfortunately, that gradually only the most hostile elements were represented in the guards, and the treatment of the Imperial Family became steadily worse.

CHAPTER XXIX

FIVE WEARY MONTHS, MARCH–AUGUST 1917

DURING the first months after the Revolution, the dread of the Emperor's being transferred to some prison, or of some violence against his person, was uppermost in the minds of all in the Palace, and though the Empress never spoke of it, she, too, realised the danger. All disturbing rumours seemed, mysteriously, to reach her. Whenever there was any talk on subjects that would distress her, she always happened to come into the room. The Household tried to hide the papers, which contained the most violent attacks on the Emperor and Empress, but she always seemed to pick up the very worst. The illustrated press, in particular, was full of dreadful, often obscene, caricatures, and though the commander had the decency not to send these upstairs, the soldiers took care that they should be seen. The revolutionary press was giving vent to an orgy of abuse and calumny. What pained the Empress most in the accusations hurled against both of them were the utterly unfounded attacks made on the Emperor by the extremists, in their search for something which might give them a handle for starting legal proceedings against him. He who had renounced everything for his country and whose fidelity to her allies was proved by his every action was openly accused of disloyalty! Words were attributed to him that he could never have uttered. These attacks were so monstrous that the Empress was forced to realise that there were no lengths to which their enemies would not go. As to the Emperor, he gave onlookers the

impression that, if there were danger, it concerned, not him, but some one else. When he did mention the incidents that so much alarmed his gentlemen, it was with a half smile of pity for the worry given to those about him. For months, every shot fired in the garden, every heated discussion in the guard-room, might have been the first step towards disaster. On the whole, the local soldiers' Soviet gave its support to the Commander of the Palace, but no one knew how long this would last. The Empress, like the Emperor, never showed any fears she may have felt. She was heroic, as she had been through all the early days of the Revolution when she and her children were in imminent danger. Her fortitude never deserted her, and she would cheer up any of those in the Household whom she saw to be depressed and anxious. She had put those she loved into the hands of the Supreme Power, feeling the hopelessness of human help, and in her constant prayers found the wonderful serenity and courage that she kept to the end.

At first neither the Emperor nor the Empress had any communication with people outside the Palace. No one dared write to them. After a few days, however, some of the Empress's friends in the hospitals sent short notes to her and her daughters, with the Commander's permission. He read all letters addressed to people in the Palace and all replies had to be sent to him open. The soldiers generally read everything, too, and though, of course, only the barest commonplaces could be written, even these were often misunderstood, and the most innocent words twisted by the soldiers into quite different meanings, so that many of the notes were not posted at all. The few letters she got from her friends were rays of light to the Empress. They gave her the feeling of human sympathy that she longed for. She always believed that the people who, after the Revolution, never sent a line or took any notice of her, did this because they were afraid

that their loyalty would harm her or the Emperor. Naturally those who wrote had to be careful of the wording of their letters, and many were really prevented from writing by the fear of causing additional trouble. It was pitiful to see the gratitude that a few kind words could elicit from both the Emperor and Empress. Her Majesty was quite cheerful for a whole day after she had received a small ikon sent by a lady to the Emperor, on the back of which was written a short prayer and her name. To balance these few words of sympathy came hundreds of insulting letters, reviling the Emperor and Empress, and accusing them of the most fantastic crimes.

The Emperor never wrote to anyone, so fearful was he of compromising his correspondents, except once to the Dowager-Empress (who had been moved by the Government to the Crimea), when the Commander told him that she was anxious about him, and that Kerensky had wished her to be pacified by the sight of a letter written in the Emperor's own hand. The greatest anxiety the Empress Alexandra had was to know the fate of her friends, and of all those in whom she had taken interest, and who might for that reason be in danger. She anxiously scanned the papers for details of Mme. Vyrouboff's arrest, for she knew that she was hated, and dared not think what might happen to her. The fact that they had become a danger to their friends was brought home to the Imperial Family by the effect of any chance words spoken to officers of the guard. One of these was spoken to by one of the Grand Duchesses, and was at once looked on with suspicion. Another kissed the hand of one of the girls in greeting, as was the usual Russian custom. The men wanted him imprisoned for his anti-revolutionary conduct! For hours shouts were heard from the guard-room, where the soldiers held a meeting to discuss the matter, and the officer in question, who had before this been quite unknown to the Imperial Family, was never

seen again. He was "pardoned," and escaped actual imprisonment, but was removed from the Palace Guard and sent to the front.

Little by little the Empress began to realise the passionate animosity that was felt against her personally. It did not make her angry. "Poor creatures!" she used to say, "they have been misled—it is an illness like measles." An insight into the Empress's mental attitude at the time can be gained by the following letter to Mme. Dehn:

TSARSKOE SELO,
June 5th, 1917.

Oh, how pleased I am that they have appointed a new Commander-in-Chief of the Baltic fleet [Admiral Rasvosoff]. I hope to God it will be better now. He is a real sailor, and I hope he will succeed in restoring order now. The heart of a soldier's daughter and wife is suffering terribly in seeing what is going on. Cannot get accustomed and do not wish to. They were such hero soldiers, and how they were spoilt just at a time when it was necessary to start to get rid of the enemy [Germans]. It will take many years to fight yet. You will understand how he [the Emperor] must suffer. He reads and tears stand in his eyes [newspapers] but I believe they will yet win [the war]. We have so many friends in the fighting line. I can imagine how terribly they must suffer. Of course nobody can write. Yesterday we saw quite new people [new guard]—such a difference. It was at last quite a pleasure to see them. Am writing again what I ought not to, but this does not go by post or you would not have received it. Of course I have nothing of interest to write. To-day is a prayer at 12 o'clock. Anastasia is to-day 16 years old—how the time flies. . . . I am remembering the past. It is necessary to look more calmly on everything. What is to be done? Once He sent us such trials, evidently He thinks we are sufficiently prepared for it. It is a sort of examination—it is necessary to prove that we did not go through it in vain. One can find in everything something good and useful. Whatever sufferings we go through—let it be. He will give us force and patience and will not leave us. He is merciful. It is only necessary to bow to His wish without murmur and await there, on the other side. He is preparing to all who love Him

undescribable joy. You are young and so are our children—how many I have besides my own. You will see better times yet here. I believe strongly the bad will pass and there will be clear and cloudless sky. But the thunderstorm has not passed yet and therefore it is stifling—but I know it will be better afterwards. One must only have a little patience—and is it really so difficult? For every day that passes quietly I thank God. . . .

Three months have passed now [since Revolution]!! The people were promised that they would have more food and fuel, but all has become worse and more expensive. They have deceived everybody—I am so sorry for them. How many we have helped, but now it is all finished. . . . It is terrible to think about it! How many people depended on us. But now? But one does not speak about such things, but I am writing about it, because I feel so sadly about those who will have it more difficult now to live. But it is God's will! My dear own, I must finish now. Am kissing you and Titi most tenderly. Christ be with you.

Most hearty greetings [from the Emperor].

Your loving

Aunt Baby.[1]

In our long *tête-à-tête* talks she often spoke to me about the events that had preceded the Revolution. Neither she nor the Emperor ever said a bitter word about all those who had abandoned them so heartlessly, or about the Ministers whose mismanagement of affairs had led to the Revolution, or even about the Generals who, like Russki, had played such a dark and fatal part in the drama. When their names were mentioned, they were passed over in silence.

When he left Mohileff, the Emperor had ordered all his suite to give their faithful service to the Provisional Government. This seemed to him the only way to save Russia. He himself reverently made the sign of the cross when the Provisional Government was prayed for in church. He wanted to inculcate this spirit into all those around him, and noticing that I did not follow his example, he remarked

[1] The name by which Mme. Dehn's small son called the Empress.

upon it, saying that I should not forget that it was Russia for which I was praying. Both the Emperor and Empress anxiously followed the trend of political events. They read the papers, no matter how painful they were to them personally, and the impression he gained of the helplessness and indecision of the Government filled the Emperor with anxiety. He dreaded the effect of the disorganisation and demoralisation of the army on the prosecution of the war. Taking the Palace Guard as specimens of what the army had become, its condition was the greatest anxiety to them both. The Emperor realised the mistaken judgments on his own part that had led in some measure to the cataclysm. For some time, however, the Empress continued to believe that all the harm had arisen from revolutionary propaganda, and from the fact that the Douma had not supported the Government and had allowed sedition to work undisturbed. She was constantly thinking about these things, turning events over in her mind ; and by degrees I think she began to see that she and the Emperor had made many political mistakes, and given their confidence to people who had mismanaged affairs. This thought was only an additional source of distress to her, and she was never completely disillusioned about the Ministers who had given such fatal advice. For many years she had believed that bad luck pursued the Emperor and herself. For Alexei Nicolaevitch, on the other hand, she had the greatest hopes. She was ready to bear everything in order that he might come into his inheritance. His reign should be glorious ; he should institute the reforms for which his parents would slowly prepare. She believed, with a fatalism that she shared with the Emperor, that they were the scapegoats for all the errors committed in previous reigns. Perhaps the lives of all princes were too easy ; they had to suffer as an expiation for the good things taken without thought by preceding generations.

The Empress longed for church services, and it was a

comfort to her when in Holy Week they were allowed in the Palace chapel. The first service was held on Palm Sunday, April 8th. Father Vassilieff was prevented by illness from coming, so the Cathedral priest, Father Beliaeff, came with a deacon and four singers. The priest was an old man, and there were tears in his eyes all the time he celebrated his first Mass in these conditions. It was a poignant moment when he brought out the Blessed Sacrament. This was the point in the service when he would have prayed for the Emperor. His emotion was so great that he could not utter the words of the new ritual, and turned away in silence. He was a kindly man, and the short morning sermon he preached every Sunday always contained a few words of consolation. The clergy stayed in the Palace all through Holy Week, but were not allowed to see or speak to anyone between the services. The singers whiled away the time between Mass and Vespers by singing the saddest dirges which resounded all through the Palace. The Imperial Family were prayed for in church by their names and patronymics, but in order not to irritate the guard their titles were not used.

The Imperial Family and the whole Household went to church twice daily during Holy Week preparatory to receiving the Sacrament. On Good Friday all went to confession and I happened to go first. To my astonishment, a soldier followed me into the chapel, and I waited for him to go before beginning my confession. The priest was waiting, but the man showed no intention of departing. The idea then flashed through my mind that the soldier meant to listen to the confessions of the Emperor and Empress and was beginning with me. This was too much. I turned politely to the man and told him that, as I was going to confess, he had better leave. As I expected, he refused to do so. A lively debate ensued, from which I emerged triumphant. I pointed out to the man that no order had been given by the Government for such an

unheard-of thing as a public confession. Even condemned criminals had the right of seeing the priest without witnesses. I asked him to call his chief, as I wished to ask him to telephone to Kerensky. Swearing loudly, the man brought his officer, who decided the matter in my favour without ringing up Petrograd, and I secured at least the privilege of undisturbed confession for their Majesties. But the whole guard was pacified with difficulty, and their suspicion of the clergy was so great that during Mass a soldier stood all the time behind the altar screen watching the priest. The inhabitants of the Palace were indeed never able to forget the presence of hostile soldiers in the town, for detachments marched past the gates once or twice every day, stopping before the Palace to play the "Marseillaise" or a particularly melancholy funeral march.

On Maundy Thursday the usual Holy Communion might not be celebrated, as the funeral of the Tsarskoe Selo victims of the Revolution had been arranged for that day. The Communion service was postponed until Saturday, and though Mass was said on Thursday, it was at the same moment as the funeral, and the voice of the priest was often drowned by the "Marseillaise" and "Internationale," played by brass bands outside. The victims were buried with great state in the Park in the centre of a broad avenue leading to the Palace. The original idea had been to dig the graves under the Palace windows, but this had to be abandoned owing to lack of space. The civic funeral ceremony lasted the best part of the morning and afternoon. Thousands of workmen and soldiers came to the function carrying banners and placards on which were mottoes of every shade of socialistic and communistic thought. They made incendiary speeches in front of the red coffins, the bands playing appropriate music, varied from time to time by a funeral march. This was the only concession to old-time prejudice, for every sign of anything reminiscent of a religious ceremony was carefully avoided. As the

speeches became more and more heated, the commander and officers of the Palace Guard grew alarmed. They saw the increasing hostility of the crowd, and feared an onslaught on the Palace. As the roars of the mourners grew louder and louder, the elements intervened, and very probably saved the Imperial Family's lives. A wind arose which developed in the course of half an hour into a hurricane. The sky grew black, and a tremendous snowstorm descended. The army of red banners fluttered desperately in the wind, many were torn from their staves, and the old trees swayed and creaked. The orators were blinded by the snow, and obliged to cling to their caps and comforters in the ever-increasing blast, so the flow of eloquence stopped, and one detachment after another tramped away, till the vast park was empty, leaving only a few torn red flags flapping in the wind on the site of the " civic graves."

On Good Friday the solemn procession of " The Holy Winding-Sheet " took place in the Palace with nearly all the usual ceremonies. The servants in the black liveries of full court mourning headed the procession, the Emperor and his family, with the Household, followed the priest, the ladies in long black dresses, the lighted tapers they carried throwing fantastic shadows on the dimly lighted walls. A less militant detachment than usual was on guard, and some of the men stood about in the big empty halls and watched the procession pass, without comment or interruption. The customary night service was held on Easter Eve, and the authorities allowed their Majesties to attend this and the usual Easter meal that followed it. It was a concession, as it was at a time when there might be no meeting between the Emperor and Empress, and was allowed only on condition that they should stand at some distance from each other in church, and that the commander and officers on guard should be present at the supper. This was a dismal repast, like a meal in a house of mourning. The Empress could scarcely bring herself to

exchange a few words with Count Benckendorff who sat beside her, her other neighbour being Father Beliaeff, to whom she dared not talk for fear it might compromise him. The Emperor and the Grand Duchesses Tatiana and Anastasia, who alone of the children were present, were quite silent, and only the commander, Colonel Korovitchenko,[1] and Mme. Narishkine kept up a strained conversation. The officer of the guard—quite a youth—seemed to choke at every morsel, and was so ill at ease that he could scarcely manage to say a couple of words. Before sitting down to the Easter repast, the Emperor had kissed all the gentlemen of the Household and the officers and men three times, according to Russian custom. The Empress did the same to the ladies, and, as she had always done, presented the gentlemen of the Household, the commander and the officers with china Easter eggs. The commander accepted his, but even here he emphasised the changed circumstances by ostentatiously brushing past the Empress, who had stepped towards him, to greet her ladies first, turning to her casually as an afterthought.

After Easter the tedium of the long days was a little relieved by the whole Household's taking a share in the Imperial children's lessons. Only M. Gilliard was left of their regular teachers, and their parents did not want their education to lapse. The Emperor undertook to

[1] Colonel Korovitchenko was a friend of Kerensky. He was a clever and well-read man, who had been a lawyer and had entered the army at the outbreak of war. He was a socialist, and had gained a certain reputation as a defender in political cases. He had a deep hatred of monarchs as a class, and it was a matter of principle with him to profit by every opportunity to show his republican ideas and make his prisoners grasp the significance of the changed *régime*. The support of Kerensky gave him self-assurance and as much authority in the eyes of the men as was possible at the time, and his firm hand did hold the soldiers in check at dangerous moments. He was a man of moods, and when he was ill-disposed would suddenly enforce perfectly useless and vexatious measures, while on other occasions he could behave reasonably. When Korovitchenko (who was eventually murdered by his men when in command of troops in Turkestan) was appointed to a higher post, he was succeeded by Colonel Kobylinsky. The latter had commanded the Tsarskoe Selo garrison since the outbreak of the revolution, and was much kinder at heart, but he had neither the advantage of Kerensky's personal support nor the same influence with the Soviets. He went with the Imperial Family to Tobolsk as commandant of the guard and kept this post till they were removed from that town.

teach his son history, of which he himself had always been a student, the Empress taught him the Catechism, Mlle. Schneider mathematics, and Dr. Botkine Russian. Countess Hendrikoff started art lessons with the Grand Duchess Tatiana, and I was entrusted with piano lessons for all the three younger Grand Duchesses and English lessons for them and Alexei Nicolaevitch. It helped to while away the time, and in this way the whole day could be occupied. In April, as the spring advanced, the Imperial Family were allowed to stay out longer in the garden. They had all suffered greatly from want of air and exercise. Every day, from three till four-thirty or five, the Imperial Family, with their suite and any servants who wished, were allowed to go into the garden set apart for their use. Sentries were posted round it at short distances from one another, and in addition a detachment of soldiers, with one or two officers in command, kept close to them during the whole time they were out. It would have been a pleasant change, if it had not been for the conduct of many of the soldiers. Notwithstanding this their Majesties went out every day, the Empress being wheeled in her bath-chair. She was not allowed to use her balcony, the door leading to which was sealed by order of the soldiers. The men seemed to be particularly irritated by her chair and her sad face, and swore loudly at her for not being *made* to walk. They always insulted the servant who pushed her chair, and once when he was replaced by the Cesarevitch's sailor attendant, Nagorny, the men were so incensed at his serving "the Tyrant's wife" that he got letters from the men of his company, condemning him to death. All the inhabitants of the Palace assembled before these outings in the semi-circular hall. The guard and officers arrived, and, after unlocking the doors with much ceremony, made the Imperial party and the servants file out before them, the soldiers bringing up the rear. There was often deliberate

Members of the Imperial household who shared the Imperial family's arrest at Tsarskoe Selo.

Prince Dolgorouki, M. Gilliard, Countess Hendrikoff, Baroness Buxhoeveden, Countess Benckendorff, Mlle. Schneider, Count Benckendorff and Dr. Derevenko.

The Emperor working in the garden at Tsarskoe Selo (after the Revolution). Behind him, the officer on guard.

delay with the key. Once it could not be found, the officer of the preceding guard having gone away with it, and the Emperor and Empress were ordered back to their rooms. When they went out there was generally a band of soldiers loitering about, who made insulting remarks, gibing at the family as they passed. All the benches and the walls were scribbled over with the coarsest insults. The officers tried to get the men back into the guard-room, but usually with little success. When the party came back, they were again standing to watch them pass. The Emperor and Empress pretended neither to see nor hear, but often, when the Empress's chair was drawn up under some shady tree, the lines on her face and her flushed cheek would show that she had heard what was said. It hurt her beyond words to see the men's disrespect to the Emperor. Some would scarcely even answer his polite greeting with their usual "Good morning, Colonel." Once, at the beginning of his imprisonment, the Emperor got his bicycle, and started to ride along the path. When he passed the sentry, the man put his bayonet through the wheel and it was only his extreme agility that saved the Emperor from a bad accident, while the men burst into loud guffaws. No one ever bicycled after that. The garden was very small, and as walking or running round and round it for two hours was very dull, the idea was started of making a kitchen garden in which all could work. This was allowed, and the Emperor and his daughters worked vigorously in the garden with the servants' help. The soldiers looked on, and sometimes one or other of them would give the young Grand Duchesses advice about their work. On the whole they were better disposed towards the children than to their parents, and the little Cesarevitch was often looked at kindly by the soldiers, though they always called him by his name, "Alexei," for fear their comrades should think them undemocratic.

Exercise in the garden did the Emperor a great deal of

good. At the beginning the soldiers had taken him for walks in the park, but while the trees were bare he could be seen, and the public began to assemble outside the railings whence they could catch sight of him. Some came out of loyalty, but the majority out of curiosity, and these walks were discontinued at the Emperor's request. While the others gardened, the Empress sat by with her needlework. The soldiers always kept close to her, listening to her talk (we were only allowed to speak Russian). They often smoked their vile tobacco straight into her face, or exchanged gross jokes to see their effect on her. Once when the Empress was sitting on a rug under a tree, I got up from my seat beside her to pick up something she had dropped. A soldier immediately took my place, remarking in reply to my protests that "*now* it was turn about." The Empress edged a little bit away, making a sign to me to be silent, for she was afraid that the whole family would be taken home, and the children robbed of an hour's fresh air. The man seemed to her not to have a bad face, and she was soon engaged in conversation with him. At first he cross-questioned her, accusing her of "despising" the people, of showing by not travelling about that she did not want to know Russia. Alexandra Feodorovna quietly explained to him that, as in her young days she had had five children and nursed them all herself, she had not had time to go about the country, and that, afterwards, her health had prevented her. He seemed to be struck by this reasoning and, little by little, he grew more friendly. He asked the Empress about her life, about her children, her attitude towards Germany, etc. She answered in simple words that she had been a German in her youth, but that that was long past. Her husband and her children were Russians, and she was a Russian too, now, with all her heart. When I came back with the officer, who seemed a decent man, and to whom I had risked appealing, fearing that the soldier might annoy the Empress, I found them peacefully dis-

cussing questions of religion. The soldier got up on our approach, and took the Empress's hand, saying "Do you know, Alexandra Feodorovna, I had quite a different idea of you? I was mistaken about you." It was the more striking because this man was the deputy of the Soviet. When he came on guard the next time he was quite polite.

It generally happened that when the soldiers talked to the Emperor or the children their hostility disappeared. They saw they were not the cruel monsters they had been taught to believe. But they were always more hostile to the Empress, and showed by their conduct the sort of propaganda that had been at work among them.

The Soviets feared that the guard might relax their vigilance, and nearly always deputed a "sovietsky" soldier to spy on the others and on the officers. This deputy was a much more important personage than the rest of the guard. At one time a whole detachment was entirely composed of members of the Soviet. They began in a very aggressive way, and at once laid down new rules, but on the next day, for some unknown reason, they were more amenable and did not give any trouble. As a rule, the guard were always suspicious of their prisoners. Late one evening they created a great disturbance in the children's rooms, as one of the men had raised a scare of "signalling." It turned out that one of the Grand Duchesses had inadvertently moved a lampshade which had seemed to give flashes of light from the window. The Cesarevitch's little model rifle excited the greatest suspicion. It was taken away, and long discussions and shouts were heard from the guard-room, the soldiers maintaining that "*they* were armed." There were spies everywhere, and some of the under-servants spied upon us, repeating what we said in the guard-room. We once found a footman kneeling at a door, listening to the conversation inside, so even in our rooms we had to be careful not to say anything that could be misinterpreted. In the garden the soldiers were continually

on the watch. A word in French to M. Gilliard, whose Russian was very bad at that time, would be followed by great unpleasantness. Towards the end of the time at Tsarskoe, an assistant commander, Damadianz, was always hiding in the bushes when the Empress was in the garden, listening to everything she said. Neither parents nor children complained of all this. "Funny, isn't it?" was all the Grand Duchesses said. Their one idea was not to make things harder for their parents.

The Emperor had always hoped through everything that his great sacrifice for his country would bear fruit, and that the war would be won. Now nothing was heard of the great Russian advance that the Staff had planned for the spring. In spite of high-sounding phrases the war had become a secondary matter and the only thing spoken of was the glorious Revolution. Great was the Emperor's joy when at last, after numerous appeals to the army, Kerensky, now Minister for War, succeeded in making a small advance in June. The Empress and the children were equally delighted, and the Emperor begged to be allowed to have a thanksgiving service at the Palace. His face seemed to light up during this service. It was the only time since the Revolution that he looked like his former self. This was really Kerensky's victory. He had gone all through the country, haranguing the soldiers, and he certainly had the talent of moving the masses by his oratory. The Emperor and Empress began to think he might be the man to save the country. During the interviews they had had with him Kerensky had impressed them with his patriotism. "That man loves Russia," the Emperor said, when Kerensky had spoken to him of the war. He had gained his respect, and the Emperor used to say that, if they had met before, he believed that, notwithstanding their very different political ideas, Kerensky could have been of great use to him in the Government. The Empress, also, gradually veered round towards

Kerensky, looking at him from an impersonal point of view. She, too, hoped that he would be able to master the situation. In his dealings with the Emperor and herself, she had believed him to be honest and, as she said, "straight," and she believed that he meant to act with justice and equity towards the Emperor. As she said, he had always been a Socialist, with the courage of his opinions, and had not changed his views to meet the fashion of the moment.

Their Majesties never breathed a word of resentment when the members of the Provisional Government took up their residence in the Imperial apartments in the Winter Palace, using the Emperor's own car and their various private possessions. If the Government in power could get the country out of its difficulties, it was welcome to anything. The Empress heard that Kerensky's health was bad, and always spoke pityingly of him, hoping that "the poor man would not break down before he had put things right."

Though the Bolshevik rising in July had been put down, the Government felt insecure, and were uneasy at having the Emperor so near the capital, where the extreme elements were always clamouring for stricter measures to be taken with the Imperial Family. On the other hand, they were in continual fear of attempts being made to release them. They, therefore, decided to remove the whole family to some out-of-the-way place, from which escape would be impossible and where attacks by the extremists could not be carried out. Doctor Botkine had spoken to Kerensky, on the occasion of one of his visits, of the necessity of a change of air for both the Empress and the children, and had suggested their being taken to Livadia. The Emperor also had proposed this when Kerensky had spoken to him about the necessity for a move from Tsarskoe; he seemed to have nothing against Livadia, though he had mentioned the alternative of some

landed gentleman's country seat in the interior of the country, far from factories and large towns. He said that the removal would be "for their good," asking the Emperor if he believed him. The Emperor replied that he did.

The whole family rejoiced at the idea of Livadia, the Empress in particular, for she hoped that they would be left there for good, and that gradually they would be given more liberty. The mild climate would prevent them from suffering from the cold in winter as they had done at Tsarskoe, for the new administration had cut off supplies of fuel, and the rooms were insufficiently heated. She began to plan how she would settle the house, for her ladies and Prince Dolgoroukoff were to accompany them.

They were to be bitterly disappointed. Kerensky had sent Makaroff, an engineer, accompanied by Count Benckendorff's assistant, to discuss details of the actual journey, but the destination to which they would be taken was not mentioned. It was only said that the ladies should take their furs. It was clear from this that they were not going to Livadia. Though the five months spent at Tsarskoe Selo had been filled with disappointment and humiliation, the contrast between their past life and their present one being always before them, the move meant to the Empress the drawing of a line between old happy days and an unknown future. Still, removal to another place in *Russia* meant a further deferring of the exile abroad that was so much dreaded by them all.

At Makaroff's order, packing was begun very discreetly, so as not to suggest to the soldiers that there was any idea of departure. As August 12th was the Grand Duke Alexei's thirteenth birthday, a *Te Deum* was sung before the ikon of "Our Lady of Znamenie," which was specially brought to the Palace. Prayers for the success of the journey were added to the usual ones. The Emperor and Empress took leave of all the servants who were not

going with them, and thanked them for their faithful service. The Empress sorted out her dresses, and sent parcels of them to humble friends and Polish refugees, who were living at Tsarskoe Selo. The departure was fixed for the night of August 13th, but owing to some mistake on the part of the authorities it was delayed for hours. There were not enough men to move the luggage, which was to be taken at the last moment, and in the meantime the soldiers had got wind of the departure, and held meetings in all the barracks to discuss whether or not it should be allowed. The Emperor and Empress waited patiently for many hours till they were told they could leave. No one knew yet where they were being taken, and they only heard their actual destination when they were in the train.

At 11.30 P.M. Kerensky arrived with the Grand Duke Michael Alexandrovitch to see the Emperor. He was present at the interview between the brothers, who had not met since the abdication of the Emperor. Kerensky sat at the far end of the room, and, as the Emperor told me, tried not to listen to the conversation, but the brothers were so much upset that they could exchange only commonplace remarks. The Grand Duke asked to see the Empress, but this was not permitted. Neither was Alexei Nicolaevitch allowed to say goodbye to his uncle whom he saw only through a chink in the doorway. By this time the departure was fixed for midnight and the whole Imperial Family went down ready dressed to the semi-circular hall. Here they sat for hours, a false alarm being raised about every thirty minutes. The luggage was being taken away. There were quantities of it, mostly bedding or things belonging to the kitchen and pantry. All the doors were open, and officers and men were continually coming in and out. The Empress and her children sat about, the poor little boy, green with fatigue, perched on a box, and holding his favourite

spaniel "Joy" by a leash. The Emperor talked to his gentlemen through the long weary wait. Once or twice they went back to their rooms to rest, but were immediately recalled by news that the cars were coming. All the delay was really caused by Kerensky's endeavours to get the soldiers' Soviets to agree to the departure. He spent nearly the whole night haranguing the men, and finally reappeared about six in the morning to say that they could now start.

All through that sad night the Empress had seen her life at Tsarskoe passing before her. She left a letter for me[1] with a few piteous words of farewell. In this, for the first time, she spoke of her feelings. "What shall the future bring to my poor children?" she wrote, "My heart breaks thinking of them."

Kerensky and Colonel Kouzmine, the commander of the Petrograd military district, a dark-faced, sinister-looking man, watched the departure from the background. Kerensky's naval A.D.C. looked on with mild interest, alert, however, for the slightest sign from his chief. The "State prisoners" were hurried into the waiting cars, a mounted escort riding beside them at top speed to the station. The Empress's face was ashy white as she went out of the door of her home for the last time. Count Benckendorff and I were left alone on the steps to see them drive away: all the others went with them.[2] The

[1] I was to join the Imperial Family later wherever they might be, as I had to undergo an operation. I eventually joined them in December 1917 at Tobolsk.

[2] Countess Hendrikoff, Mlle. Schneider, Prince Dolgoroukoff and M. Gilliard went with the Imperial Family. They were joined in the train by General Tatistcheff. General Tatistcheff replaced Count Benckendorff, who was prevented by his health from going to Tobolsk. Count Benckendorff was a grave loss. By his great tact and by the personal respect he inspired, even in the people of the new *régime*, he had managed to shield the Imperial Family from feeling the full extent of the hostility with which they were surrounded, and avoiding still harsher treatment for them. On the other hand, his advice carried great weight with the Imperial couple, who had known and much appreciated him during the twenty-three years he had been with them. Count Benckendorff always held aloof from politics, on which, however, he had a shrewd and clear judgment. He was the brother of the last Russian Ambassador to the Court of St. James. Count Benckendorff died in January 1921 in a small hospital on the Esthonian frontier, having caught a chill

Empress wrote to me later that she felt the whole force of their desolation when she saw our lonely figures and the expression of our faces. We were so much overcome by the tragedy we were watching that we both leant against the wall, unable even to wave a hand or make a sign of farewell.

during his escape from Russia, where he had undergone severe privations and hardships. Old Mme. Narishkine had fallen ill with bronchitis and had been taken to the Big Palace on May 25th. She was not allowed back. The Empress cried bitterly when she left, saying that she should never see her again.

CHAPTER XXX

TOBOLSK, AUGUST 1917 TO APRIL 1918

THE difficulties at Tsarskoe Selo before the departure showed how unwilling were the extremists to let the Imperial Family out of their clutches, and how little authority the Government really enjoyed. The place of exile chosen by the Government was Tobolsk, a town far off in the most deserted part of Siberia. Here they arrived safely on August 19th. At Tobolsk was the shrine of St. John, to which the Empress had sent Mme. Vyrouboff on pilgrimage on her behalf in 1916, and she tried to see a good omen in this coincidence. The Government had seen to the outward comfort of the travellers during their long journey. They had a special train, made up of first-class sleeping cars, to which a restaurant-car was attached. There were armed soldiers with them, but the men on duty were at the end of each coach and not actually in the carriage. A member of the Douma, Vershinine, had been deputed to accompany them, as well as the engineer, Makaroff, who had made all the arrangements for the journey, and two members of the "Soviet." In order not to excite suspicion, and to avert the possibility of delay, the train was said to be taking a Japanese Red Cross mission across Siberia. There were, however, a few stoppages, and when the train passed through any large station all the blinds were drawn. The train was stopped daily for about half an hour to allow the Emperor and the children to take exercise. The Emperor was asked by the deputies to keep away from the engine in case the driver might recognise him.

House at Tobolsk, where the Imperial family lived 1917—18.
(Guards changing.)

The Grand Duchesses, with the elastic spirits of youth, when they had got over their first grief at leaving Tsarskoe, began to take an interest in their new surroundings. The Empress lay all day in her carriage, utterly exhausted in both body and mind. She had been terribly disappointed at not going to Livadia. This was really exile, and she felt that Siberia had been chosen to emphasise the point. She got some consolation from the fact that the deputies were civil to the Emperor. The few soldiers in the train were a vast improvement on the horde at Tsarskoe, as Colonel Kobylinsky had carefully chosen the most reasonable men from the Rifle regiments to form their guard. Some of the men talked in a friendly way to the children, and even, at one stopping-place, picked some cornflowers and gave them to the Empress who was leaning out of the window. At Tjumen the whole party was transferred to the steamer *Rouss*, as there was no railway line to Tobolsk. It was said that the company had wanted to put their largest and finest boat at the Emperor's disposal, but the river Tobol was too shallow at that time of year and the smaller *Rouss* had to be used. It was a fairly comfortable boat, and the Imperial Family were delighted with this part of the journey. They had the illusion of freedom, and the scenery reminded them of their trip on the Volga during the Romanoff celebrations. The country along the banks was very thinly populated, and they passed very few villages during their thirty-six hours' voyage. One of these villages was Pokroffskoe, the birthplace of Rasputine. The Empress could not help remembering that he had said to her that, willingly or unwillingly, they would pass his house some day. The population kept away from the river banks. They were not hostile to the Imperial Family, but, even if they knew who were the travellers in the *Rouss*, they feared to get into trouble by showing their sympathy with such political prisoners. The first impression of Tobolsk, as

seen from the steamer, was a favourable one. The town was picturesque, built for the most part on the high banks of the river at the spot where the Tobol falls into the mighty Irtych. The sunset light gilded the domes of the churches, and the bells, ringing for vespers, reminded the travellers of the bell-ringing on official visits in happier times. It looked peaceful and pretty.

They discovered too soon, however, that this was an outward impression only. Nothing had been prepared for them in the house destined for their use. The want of proper arrangements for their departure from Tsarskoe had already shown that the former Sovereign was of no importance even to those who were not aggressively hostile. Prince Dolgoroukoff and General Tatistcheff,[1] who went to inspect the house with Colonel Kobylinsky, pronounced it uninhabitable in its present state. It had originally been the Governor's residence, but had since been used as a barracks and was indescribably filthy.

The Archbishop Hermogene, who had fallen into disfavour with the Court owing to his hostility to Rasputine, had been appointed by the Provisional Government to the see of Tobolsk. He now offered his own residence to the Imperial Family. This house had the advantages of a private chapel and a garden, but the rooms, which were really only a series of large halls, were most uncomfortable, and it had to be declined with many thanks. It was finally decided that the Governor's house should be painted and cleaned, and while this was being done the Imperial Family stayed on board the steamer. This they really enjoyed. They were allowed to take short trips

[1] T. L. Tatistcheff had been one of the Emperor's general *aides-de-camp*, and had been attached before the war to the Russian Embassy in Berlin. The Emperor had chosen him to accompany him instead of Count Benckendorff, when it became known that the latter's health would not allow him to go to Tobolsk, and General Tatistcheff had instantly expressed his willingness to join the Imperial Family in their captivity. He remained with them all the time they were at Tobolsk and accompanied the Imperial children to Ekaterinburg. On his arrival he was separated from them and taken to prison, and is said to have been murdered there by the Bolsheviks in June 1918.

up the river, and disembark for walks, the guard following them at a reasonable distance. They were encouraged to hope that the captivity at Tobolsk might be milder, especially as the gentlemen-in-waiting were allowed to walk freely about the town while they were making the arrangements for the furnishing of the house. All the necessary furniture was bought from private individuals in the town, and the house was ready on August 26th. The Imperial Family moved into it on that day, the Household being lodged in a house opposite, belonging to a merchant named Korniloff. The Emperor and Empress went to see the quarters of their suite on the day of their arrival. This was to be the only time they were allowed to leave their house. There had been vague suggestions before leaving Tsarskoe that the Grand Duchesses might be given more freedom. It had been pointed out several times by the Commandant that they were not under arrest, but had only joined their parents willingly, as had the members of the Household. Kobylinsky had even hoped that the Emperor might be allowed to have some shooting when he was settled at Tobolsk. The actual conditions turned out to be very different. The Imperial prisoners were not permitted to leave the house, except to go to church occasionally on Sundays, or on great holy days, and then they were accompanied by a strong armed escort. The severity towards them increased as time went on.

The house, when it was finally ready, was fairly comfortable. Some private possessions, carpets, favourite pictures, etc., had been sent from Tsarskoe by order of Makaroff. Their Majesties had a bedroom, the Emperor a dressing-room, the four Grand Duchesses shared a bedroom, and the Cesarevitch had his own, with his sailor servant in a room next door. There was a sitting-room for the Empress and a study for the Emperor on the first floor, besides a large hall where, later, a portable church was erected. The dining-room was on the ground

floor. M. Gilliard and some of the personal servants also lived in the Governor's house, the rest of the servants were with the Household in the house opposite. Countess Hendrikoff, Mlle. Schneider, and the gentlemen-in-waiting had all their meals with the Imperial Family. They were allowed to cross the street unattended, as the distance was quite short. For some time, indeed, the suite were allowed to take walks by themselves in the town, but this was gradually discontinued. At first they were allowed to go out on certain days only. Then their walks had always to be taken under the escort of an armed soldier, and after the New Year even these restricted outings were very seldom allowed. The Imperial Family got what air they could in the kitchen garden belonging to the Governor's house. This was a very small space with nothing in it but a few cabbages, and to it a part of the street had been added, hastily enclosed by high wooden palings. This enclosure became a quagmire in the autumn, as it was unpaved. There was not a single tree or bush in it. Winter begins early in those northern regions, the first snow generally falling in September, but 1917 was an exceptionally mild year and there were no heavy snow falls before the beginning of November. But the climate in Tobolsk is severe, and in January the temperature went down to 50° C. below freezing point; there was, however, no wind, which made it bearable, and the sun shone brightly every day for a couple of hours.

The great drawback of the house was its extreme chilliness. In the Governor's time there had been a special system of heating, used, probably, regardless of cost, but now there was not much fuel, and the whole family suffered terribly. The temperature in the rooms was often not more than + 7° C. Even the Empress felt half-frozen, and her fingers were so stiff with chilblains that she could not wear her rings, and could scarcely move her knitting-needles. The Grand Duchesses, who

The Empress and her two eldest daughters on the balcony at Tobolsk, September, 1917.

always felt the cold, wore all the warm clothing they could find.

Tobolsk was a small town of about 30,000 inhabitants and was quite out of the world. It was only during the four summer months that the navigation of the river was possible, and during the rest of the year all communication with Tjumen, 287 versts away, had to be kept up by horses. It would have been impossible for the prisoners to escape. If they had attempted it, the alarm could have been given by telegraph before they were twenty miles away, and there were very few villages on the long stretch of land from Tjumen to Tobolsk. Any such idea, however, was far removed from the thoughts of the Emperor and Empress. They were glad to be away from the political turmoil, and hoped that in that desolate place they might be forgotten and allowed to stay in Russia, their own wish to the last. On New Year's Eve, 1917, the Empress wrote to me: "Thank God, we are still in Russia and all together."

The people of the town were not hostile. It was too far away for propaganda to have penetrated, and patriarchal customs still prevailed. The Emperor was still the Emperor in Tobolsk, and many people bared their heads when they passed the Governor's house. When the Imperial party were taken to church, the crowd was kept at a distance, but there were many who crossed themselves as the Emperor went by. Many of the merchants, too, sent gifts of food, some openly, some anonymously. These were very welcome. In that severe climate the only vegetables were cabbages and carrots. Potatoes had to be brought from Tjumen. Fish was plentiful, of course, and there was an abundance of game.

There was no garrison at Tobolsk, and the guard, under Colonel Kobylinsky, consisting of 350 men from the Tsarskoe Selo Rifles, was the only authority. At first they seemed inclined to a more gentle *régime*, and Colonel

Kobylinsky and his officers kept control over their men. But under the influence of ceaseless propaganda, his authority weakened. The Provisional Government had appointed a civilian Kommissar, in the person of Vassili Semenovitch Pankratoff, a former political prisoner, who had spent the best part of his life in Siberia. He was not a bad man, though his first term of detention in his youth had been on a charge of manslaughter. He had been imbued with the most extreme doctrines of socialism, and was really a fanatic with ideals. He and his assistant, a coarse, half-educated man called Nicolsky, insisted on reading socialistic lectures to the soldiers. At first these did not affect them, but gradually, out of boredom—they had not much to do—they began to discuss their " rights." The Commander's orders began to be disregarded, and the little Soviet assumed greater importance. Pankratoff himself was always afraid of the soldiers. He would have given more liberty to the Imperial children, whom, personally, he rather liked, but he would not take upon himself the responsibility of authorising it.

Much harm was unwittingly done at this time by the sudden arrival at Tobolsk of a girl friend of the Grand Duchesses, Marguerita (Rita) Serguevna Hitrovo, one of the honorary maids-of-honour. She had had no post at Court, but had nursed in the Empress's hospital, and had conceived a great admiration for the Grand Duchess Olga Nicolaevna. During her journey she behaved most foolishly, and wrote imprudently worded postcards to her family, which excited the suspicion that she was coming on a political errand. When she reached Tobolsk in September, she walked straight into the Korniloff house to see Countess Hendrikoff. No one was allowed to enter the house without a special permit. She was, of course, seen by the soldiers, the alarm was given, and Mlle. Hitrovo was immediately arrested and taken to Moscow. She had brought some perfectly innocent letters

for the Imperial Family, which she intended to give to Kobylinsky to pass on to them, but she had broken the rules, and her visit to Countess Hendrikoff resulted in a cross-examination and a day's arrest in her room for the Countess, and many anxious moments for the Commander. It was ultimately proved in Moscow that Mlle. Hitrovo had no political importance at all, and that her journey was undertaken solely from a desire to see her beloved Grand Duchess. She was released, but the prisoners at Tobolsk suffered from her escapade. Though the Imperial Family had not seen her, the soldiers were incensed by this breaking of rules, and increased their vigilance and severity. They feared that "plotting" was going on, and it was in consequence of Mlle. Hitrovo's visit that the suite were allowed out only under armed guard. When, in November, the Empress's dresser, Madeleine Zanotti, and two maids arrived from Tsarskoe Selo, they were not admitted, though they had the necessary authority from Kerensky. A similar fate befell me also, when I arrived. Though I was allowed to stay at the Korniloff house with the other members of the Household for some weeks, I had ultimately to lodge in the town, though I could see the members of the suite every day; and while I lived in the Korniloff house, I was never once allowed to go out for a walk.

The morning after my arrival at the Korniloff house at Tobolsk the Empress wrote to me at 8 A.M.:

Xmas Eve, 1917
(Dec. 11/24).

Good morning, dear Isa,—I hope you slept well and don't feel too beaten and exhausted to-day. I send you this image with my blessing, from the Saint of Tobolsk—John Maximovich—Metropolitan of Tobolsk. His relics lie in the cathedral on the hill (alas! we have not yet been there). Hang it up, and may he be your Guard and Guide. May you soon get strong, well, and fed

up again here. We have service at 12, wonder whether you may come to it, as the guard will just have changed and it would be nice to begin your entry by prayers.

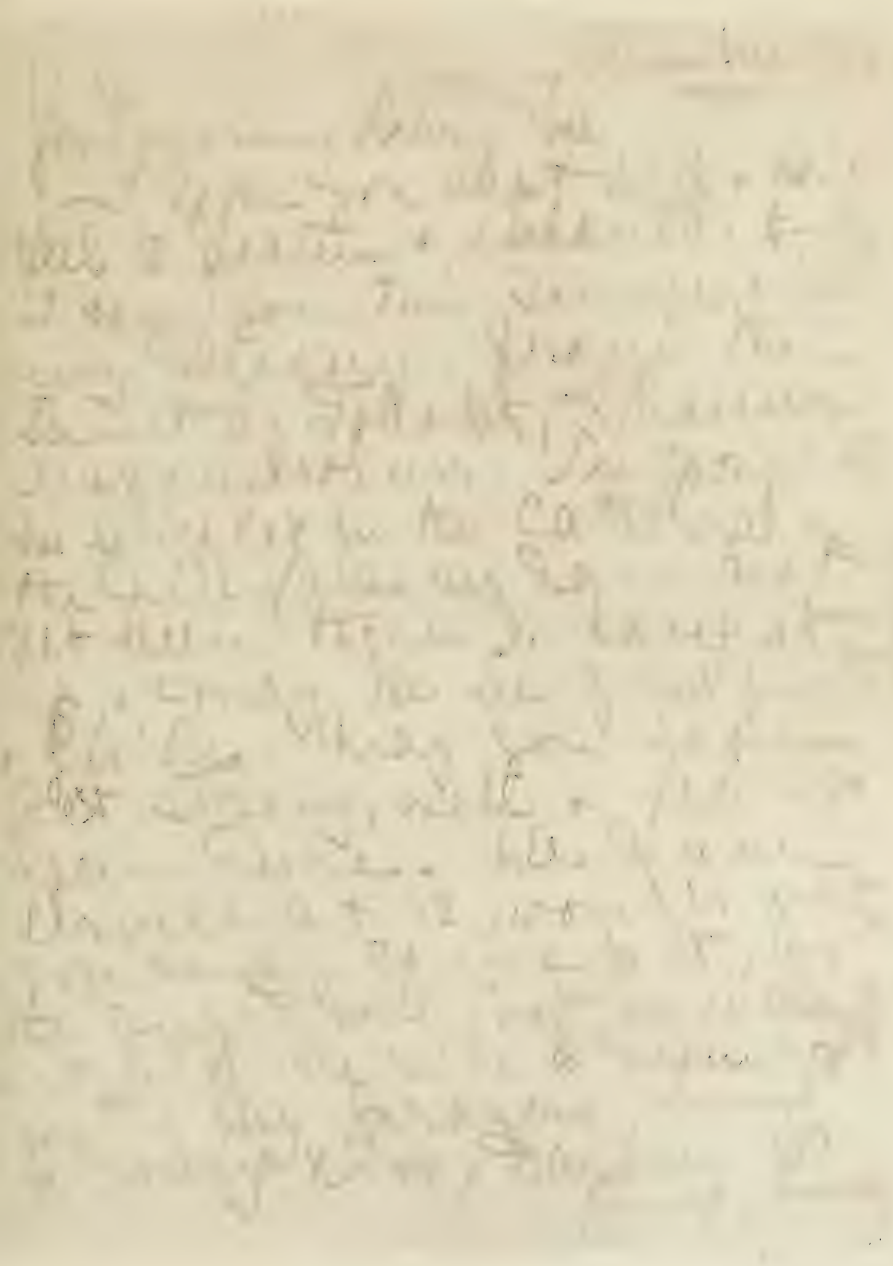
A loving kiss, Darling, fr.

A.

No one from outside was allowed to see the Imperial Family, except occasionally dentists, or an oculist for the Empress, all brought in by the Kommissar Prankratoff and Kobylinsky. Doctor Derevenko's son, Kolia, was allowed to come and play with the Cesarevitch. Even at Christmas the rule was not relaxed, and Doctor Botkine's son and daughter, who lived with their father in the Korniloff house, were not allowed into the Governor's house, on the plea that they were not the Imperial children's usual playfellows, as they had never been invited to the Palace, either at Tsarskoe Selo or at Livadia.

In November the news of the Bolshevik revolution of November 7th reached Tobolsk. It was so far away that it produced no change. The officials of the Provisional Government, including the Governor, remained at their posts, the banks were open, and the law courts continued to work. Moscow was ignored, and while the money lasted Tobolsk ruled itself. The guard had become used to their prisoners and were, on the whole, polite to them. There were, however, continual small conflicts and occasional rows. There was trouble, originated by Nicolsky, over some St. Raphael wine which was kept in reserve for the children. This was triumphantly poured out into the river. But, on the whole, things jogged on till Christmas, when the soldiers allowed the Imperial Family to spend as many hours as they liked in their enclosure, presented arms to the Emperor, and greeted him with the usual "Good morning, Colonel," in answer to his salute.

A more serious unpleasantness, and one that the Empress felt greatly, occurred at Christmas, when the priest made an unfortunate slip of the tongue in praying



AUTOGRAPH NOTE OF THE EMPRESS TO THE AUTHOR.

for the Imperial Family, and gave them their former titles. It was never discovered if it was the priest or the deacon who had done this, but the soldiers raised a hue and cry, and the priest was threatened with imprisonment. With the greatest difficulty, the Archbishop managed to have this sentence commuted, but the priest was sent away and the Imperial Family were bereft of the comfort of a " real " church. After that time their church-going was a rare occurrence, as the soldiers raised objections every time, and the Archbishop finally helped them out of their difficulties by allowing a temporary chapel to be erected in the house.

When the soldiers realised that the November revolution seemed to have installed the Bolsheviks permanently in Moscow, they began to see that the authorities at Tobolsk had no Government to back them up. The soldiers enforced their opinions more and more and the officers had to conciliate them, knowing that they had now nothing to rely on but their personal prestige. So long as the men's pay was in Colonel Kobylinsky's hands, however, and he could pay it regularly, things went on more or less as before. They had obliged the officers to take off their badges of rank and decorations, and the Emperor was asked to do the same so as not to tempt the men to force him to do so. But the men were clearly getting the upper hand. The Empress saw the change in the soldiers, but she hoped it was only a passing phase. She wrote to me at Christmas :

A blessed Xmas to you, Iza dearest ! And a loving wish and kiss. Above all, I wish God to give you good health, peace of mind, " doushevny mir " [*peace of soul*], which is the greatest gift. We can ask for patience, which we all need in this world of suffering (and utter madness), consolation, strength and happiness. A " joyful Xmas " might sound like mockery, but it means joy over the New-born King, who died to save us all, and does not that renew one's trust and faith in God's infinite mercy ? He is so far above all, is All in all : He will show mercy, when

the right time comes, and we must patiently and resignedly await His good will. We are helpless to mend matters—can only trust, trust and pray and never lose faith or one's love to Him. Prayed for you, and shall again at mass—too hard you cannot go. I so hoped by a side door to another church. The Emperor and all the children send many a message and good wish. They share my regret. God bless you. Won't you look out of your window and tell Nastinka [Countess Hendrikoff] when ? At one, let's say, and then we can peep at the corner window, and perhaps catch a glimpse of you. Just off to church ! God bless and protect you. A loving kiss from your affectionate A. A happy Xmas to Miss Mather. [My former governess, who had accompanied me on my journey to Siberia.]

The Empress's deep religious faith had come to her aid and helped her to bear her trials with fortitude and be hopeful to the end. At Tobolsk she gained that unearthly calm which sometimes comes to those who feel the Great Shadow before them, without, perhaps, entirely realising its nearness. She had fought so hard against her human weaknesses that she had attained to the real Christian humility and trained her proud spirit not to rebel. During those long months of introspection she learned to look, in all sincerity, at trials and hardships as a gift of God, a fit preparation for the future blessed life. She had always seen the Life Eternal as her ultimate goal, and now that her links with earthly things were slackening, she saw the gates of Heaven very near.

Both the Emperor and Empress had realised the danger to their own lives from the beginning of the Revolution, but though the Empress hoped for no mercy from the extremists in Moscow, who were most of them not Russians at all, she still trusted that no real Russian would ever lay hands on his Tsar. She was convinced that her children were in no actual danger. She foresaw a sad future for her daughters, spending their youth in such tragic circumstances, but she did not fear for their lives. All through her own troubles, Alexandra Feodorovna

thought of others, not only those actually with her, but those far away. Notwithstanding their ever-increasing financial difficulties, she managed to send parcels of food to humble friends at Tsarskoe Selo, where by this time people were nearly starving. Things were indescribably worse in Russia than they ever had been in Imperial times. All the Empress's letters at this time are full of concern for her friends, and show, more clearly than any words of mine, the thoughts that filled her mind. She wrote to Mme. Vyrouboff from Tobolsk in March :

My heart is troubled, but my soul remains tranquil, as I feel God always near. Yet, what are they deciding on at Moscow? God help us! . . . Peace, and yet the Germans continue to advance further and further.

Again :

When will it all finish? How I love my country, with all its faults! It grows dearer and dearer to me, and I thank God daily, that He has allowed us to remain here and did not send us further away. Believe in the people, darling. The nation is strong and young and as soft as wax. Just now, it is in bad hands, and darkness, anarchy reigns. But the King of Glory will come, and will save, strengthen and give wisdom to the people who are now deceived.

She liked to believe that the Lenten season and coming spring might work a change in men as well as in nature :

Soon spring is coming to rejoice our hearts [she wrote to the same correspondent on March 15th, 1918]. The way of the cross first, then joy and gladness. It will soon be a year since we parted, but what is time? Life here is nothing—Eternity is everything, and what we are doing, is preparing our souls for the Kingdom of Heaven. Thus, nothing, after all, is terrible, and if they do take everything from us, they cannot take our souls. . . . Have patience, and these days of suffering will end. We shall forget all anguish and thank God. God help those who only see the bad and don't try and understand that all this will pass. . . .

In another letter she says :

All is in God's will. The deeper you look, the more you understand that this is so. All sorrows are sent us to free us from our sins or as a test of our faith, an example to others. It requires good food to make plants grow properly and the gardener, walking through His garden, wants to be pleased with His flowers. If they do not grow properly, He takes His pruning knife, and cuts, waiting for the sunshine to coax them into growth again. I should like to paint a picture of this beautiful garden and all that grows in it. I remember English gardens and at Livadia you saw an illustrated book I had, so you will understand. Just now eleven men passed on horseback—good faces, mere boys. I have not seen the like for a long time. They are the guard of the new Kommissar.[1] Sometimes we see men with the most awful faces. I would not include them in my garden picture. The only place for them would be outside, where the merciful sunshine could reach them and make them clean from all dirt and evil, with which they are covered.

Count Benckendorff had said of the Empress after she had heard the news of the Emperor's abdication : "*Elle est grande, grande . . . mais j'avais toujours dit, que c'était un de ces caractères qui s'élèvent au sublime dans le malheur.*" Those who were with her during her captivity at Tsarskoe Selo and at Tobolsk can vouch for the truth of those words.

The Empress spent her long days in preparing the lessons she continued to give her two children, German to the Grand Duchess Tatiana and the Catechism to the Cesarevitch, since the priest could not be counted on for lessons, after the trouble about the names in church.

She got up late at times, and had her meals with Alexei Nicolaevitch in her own room. She read a great deal, worked, copied out music and practised the singing of the responses for the church services, at which both she and her daughters joined in the chants. She very seldom went out, but sometimes, when it was fine and warmer, sat in the sun on her balcony, well wrapped up. When the

[1] Probably the Lett, Doutzmann, is meant, who installed himself in Pankratoff's place. It was never known if he was sent from Moscow or from Omsk.

others were out she would often spend hours at the piano. She had no music, but played from memory, passing from one favourite piece to the other, as the spirit moved her. In the evenings, when all the Household were present, if the Emperor did not read aloud the Empress would play bezique with him. She had, all her life, had a feeling that cards were a little wrong, but sacrificed her own conscience in this case in order to amuse him and help him to pass the time. His days were terrible in their monotony. He read, and gave history lessons to his son, but for a man of active brain and body, such a life was unutterably wearisome. Happily, they could all go out into their courtyard whenever they wished, so that he could get exercise in the open, either in shovelling away the snow or in sawing wood. He also helped the children to build a small ice-hill for the Cesarevitch, which was a great pleasure to all the young people. It was a sign of the change of mood in the soldiers after the New Year that they destroyed this ice-hill on the ground that from it the children could see the people passing in the street.

For a long time before Christmas the Empress and her daughters worked at Christmas presents for all the Household and servants. They made most of these gifts themselves. This gave the presents greater value and was, at the same time, a saving of expense. There was a Christmas tree, and the commander and the little Cesarevitch's tutors took part in the family *fête*. The Botkine children and I were not allowed to join the party, and to us the Empress sent little trees adorned by herself. Even my old governess whom she had never met was not forgotten. The Empress had drawn her a little picture of holly to remind her of Christmas in England, which she sent with a note begging her to "allow a countrywoman's daughter to send her the small gift she had made for her, with her warm wishes."

The young people seemed cheerful enough, but the two

elder realised how serious things were becoming. The Grand Duchess Olga told me that they put on brave faces for their parents' sake. The younger children did not realise their danger, and the Grand Duchess Marie said once to Mr. Gibbes, in the early days of their stay, that she would be quite content to remain for ever in Tobolsk! In the course of the winter they even acted a few small plays in French and English, which made a welcome diversion. The two tutors coached them, and the Grand Duchess Anastasia, in particular, showed a decided talent for comedy. Even the Empress laughed during these performances, and took great interest in them, for her children's sake, writing the programmes, and helping the actors to dress up. The sole audience were the suite and the servants living in the house, and, of course, the commander was present.

After January new difficulties arose for the Imperial Family. Matters of which they had never even thought now forced themselves on their notice. Up till this time the Government had paid for the upkeep of the establishment. When the first Provisional Government was replaced by the Bolsheviks, funds ceased to come from Petrograd, and Kobylinsky had difficulty in providing the pay of his men. In order to supply the wants of the Household, Prince Dolgoroukoff and General Tatistcheff signed bills in their own names, but the merchants were becoming anxious; and the shops were reluctant to give further credit. There was still some money left of that provided by Count Benckendorff for the journey, but in order to make this last as long as possible, it was necessary to practise the most rigid economy. When Prince Dolgoroukoff explained this to the Empress, she talked the matter over with the gentlemen-in-waiting and it was settled that she, Prince Dolgoroukoff and M. Gilliard, a practical Swiss, would undertake the housekeeping together and work out the lines on which it could be managed with the minimum

The Empress's corner in the drawing room at Tobolsk, 1917.

View of the temporary chapel from the drawing room.

of cost. Some of the servants had to be discharged, the Empress giving them enough money to take them back to Petrograd, should they wish to go there. Those that remained offered to work without pay. This the Empress would not agree to, though she was much touched by their offer, and all the salaries were proportionately cut down. The members of the Household joined in paying the kitchen bills. The one o'clock dinner was the chief meal, and consisted of soup, a dish of meat or fish, and some stewed fruit. Supper was generally of macaroni or rice or pancakes followed by vegetables. Often "gifts from Heaven," as the Empress called the anonymous presents of fish and game, came to supplement this somewhat meagre fare. When these were not forthcoming, there was only just enough to go round—no second helping for anyone. There were no luxuries, of course, except when as a very rare treat a rich merchant sent some *caviar* or some specially fine fish. Sugar was very scarce, three lumps a day being doled out to each person. Coffee was unknown to everyone, except to the Empress, to whom it played the part of a medicine. Butter was dispensed with, except when it came as a gift. The Empress's fine underlinen gave way under the merciless washing of the local laundry. There was no money to buy new things, and in any case nearly all the shops, except those that sold necessaries, were closed, the few articles that were smuggled through from Japan being sold at fancy prices. As it happened, a few friends heard of this particular difficulty, and sent the commander some underlinen and warm clothes for the Empress and her daughters. She was quite overcome with gratitude, and afraid that the givers must have deprived themselves on her account. Thus the long, dark, winter days dragged on monotonously, all striving to keep up intellectual interests in order not to be affected by the small, petty incidents of semi-prison life.

What was particularly painful during those tedious

months was the lack of reliable news as to what was happening in the world. Letters came irregularly. The Bolshevik *régime* had stopped the working of the post, and there were so many Tchekas to be passed by letters before they reached Tobolsk that numbers were lost on the way. When letters did come, no one dared write openly, even to the Household. The newspapers that reached Tobolsk contained nothing but official telegrams, distorted and coloured by the Bolshevik authorities. I remember, for instance, having seen an account, giving full details, of a revolution in Denmark in 1918, and was very much surprised when I arrived there next year to hear that there had been nothing of the kind.

Still these papers, such as they were, gave us all the news we had, and through them we were able to gain a slight impression of the effects of the Revolution. The Emperor and Empress were distressed beyond words at the state into which the country was drifting. This was the thing that poisoned their lives. Russia's fate was still their main thought. All the Empress's notes to me were filled with this idea. Her letters to Mme. Vyrouboff show the same feeling, though more carefully worded, as these letters had to pass the censorship of the post. She wrote : " I cannot think calmly about it—such hideous pain in heart and soul. Yet I am sure God will not leave it like this. He will send wisdom and save Russia, I am sure." The Brest-Litovsk peace was a great blow—their real agony, for the Emperor's great sacrifice had been in vain.

In February orders came from the regimental headquarters at Tsarskoe Selo that some of the older men of the guard were to be relieved, as their time was up, while others would be sent to take their places. It seemed that the men had become rather uneasy at being still under the orders of the old Provisional Government, and had secretly sent two of their number to Moscow to see what was going on. These men had been well received, and on their return had

told their comrades that the new rulers seemed firmly established and had to be reckoned with in the future. In the meantime Moscow had remembered Tobolsk. A Soviet was elected in the town by Moscow's orders, the Governor retired, and in the second half of February Pankratoff and Nicolsky left hurriedly, as the new soldiers from Tsarskoe Selo had threatened to imprison them. Soon after a man called Doutzmann was appointed Commandant in succession to Pankratoff, and took up his quarters in the Korniloff house. These new soldiers were of the same type as those under whom we had suffered at Tsarskoe. When the old guard left, some of the men came secretly to take leave of the Imperial Family. They had ended by having a real liking for the children, and were altogether less hostile than they had been at first.

At the end of March more soldiers arrived at Tobolsk. Up till this time the town had been spared. At Tjumen bands of sailors had struck terror into the inhabitants, looting and imprisoning under the pretext of "requisitions," but they had not undertaken the long horse journey to Tobolsk. Now Tobolsk had unwelcome visitors in its turn. No one knew if they were sent under orders from Moscow or not, but it was surmised that the new arrivals came of their own accord.

On March 26th a band of soldiers arrived from Omsk, the chief town in Eastern Siberia, and its administrative centre. They took up their quarters in the girls' schools, under the command of a certain Dementieff. Except that they saw that the Bolshevik *régime* was carried out everywhere, their arrival did not cause many changes in the town, and they did not interfere with the Imperial Family's guard. They were followed by another detachment from the neighbouring mining centre, Ekaterinburg. The soldiers that formed these detachments were mostly Letts, some former sailors and some Ekaterinburg workmen. The people of Tobolsk were terrified by them. Well-to-do

merchants were arrested and imprisoned every day, in order that they might be bailed out by their families for large sums. Requisitions began, and posters were hung up in the streets, saying that all gold and silver and valuables must be given up to the authorities under penalty of death. The men started domiciliary visits with, or often without, search-warrants from the local Soviet which was now in command. The Omsk and the Ekaterinburg bands did not seem to get on well together, and in April the Ekaterinburg men departed to exact requisitions from Beresoff, a town in the extreme north. They were replaced in a few days by another detachment from Ekaterinburg with a Jew, Zaslavsky, at their head. Though every party of newcomers may have hoped, secretly, to get possession of the Emperor and his family, they did not try to do this forcibly; for the regular guard announced that if anyone tried to take their prisoners from them, they would kill the whole Imperial Family themselves before they gave them up. The soldiers of the guard were getting perceptibly nervous, however, at all these new arrivals. They feared that they would be replaced if they did not show extreme severity in their treatment of the prisoners, and, in consequence, they forbade the suite to go out, were very severe with the servants, and even insisted on paying a domiciliary visit to the Governor's house, to see that there were no arms hidden away there.

Colonel Kobylinsky managed to pacify his men by providing new occupations, and charged them with guarding the wine stores in the town. This was a paid duty that had been carried out by Austrian prisoners, but as the latter were leaving in accordance with the treaty of Brest-Litovsk, they had to be replaced.

In April orders came from Moscow for the arrest of "the citizens Dolgoroukoff, Tatistcheff, and Hendrikoff," and the two gentlemen and the two ladies (Mlle. Schneider being included by Kobylinsky) were taken over to the

Governor's house (April 13th). This was now greatly overcrowded, and the newcomers had to live two and three in a room, as the ladies were accompanied by their maids.

The Empress was not blind to the meaning of these changes. She wrote to Mme. Vyrouboff on April 3rd, 1918: "Though we know that the storm is coming nearer our souls are at peace. Whatever happens will be through God's will. Thank God, at least, the little one is better." She had had anxiety for the Cesarevitch added to her other burdens, for he had been dangerously ill. He had caught whooping-cough from his playfellow, Kolia Derevenko, and had burst a blood-vessel in coughing. The internal haemorrhage was nearly as bad as during his attack at Spala. Dr. Derevenko was in despair, for he lacked nearly every drug he needed in the badly stocked little town. Alexei Nicolaevitch had been very well up till this time, as had his sisters. They had had German measles in January, but on the whole had not suffered from the climate. The Empress sat day and night with her boy, only allowing the Grand Duchess Tatiana to relieve her for a few hours. The pains were intolerable, the fever was high, and the boy's life hung in the balance. Happily, Dr. Derevenko tried a new remedy, which proved successful, and the bleeding stopped.

The fever was still extremely high, however, and the patient very weak when the blow fell. The leaders in Moscow had at last turned their attention to the prisoners at Tobolsk. No one in Tobolsk knew why they chose that particular time nor what they meant to do. The arrival of the special envoy, Iakovleff, was a surprise to Kobylinsky, and, apparently, to everyone else. Iakovleff came on April 22nd, provided with full powers. His arrival was shrouded in mystery. He was guarded by a band of mounted soldiers and had two assistants, a sailor, called Khokhriakoff, and a former officer, Rodionoff. The first-named had apparently been a stoker on the *Alexander II.*

Iakovleff himself, though he, too, wore the dress of a blue-jacket, was of higher social standing. It appeared that he had been a political refugee, and was a man of some culture. His arrival completely threw Doutzmann into the shade. He assembled the guard and loaded them with praises, telling them that the Government intended to pay them highly as a reward for their loyal service. He seemed to Colonel Kobylinsky to be a man accustomed to handle the masses. The soldiers and local Soviet were impressed by his credentials, which were signed by Sverdlov himself. According to them, it was for him to give orders now. He had to be obeyed, as he could have anyone executed without trial if he wished. He was, evidently, an important person. Nothing was said at first about the motive of his mission, but it was soon evident to Colonel Kobylinsky that he intended taking the Imperial Family away. He seems to have realised that it would be impossible to move Alexei Nicolaevitch in the state he was then in, for, after having been to the Governor's house and seen the whole family, he returned a second time to see Alexei Nicolaevitch and then had long telegraphic communications with Moscow. Iakovleff had told the guard that they and Colonel Kobylinsky would now be relieved of their duties. The Colonel remained nominally at his post till May 14th, but all the orders were given by Iakovleff and Rodionoff. Kobylinsky gathered the impression that Iakovleff was not personally hostile to the Emperor, and he was, in fact, rather optimistic after he had got over the first shock of the new *régime*. General Tatistcheff was not so hopeful, and told me that he considered this the most dangerous crisis the Imperial Family had ever gone through.

On April 25th Iakovleff told the Emperor that he was going to take him away, though he did not say why or where. When the Emperor refused to leave, Iakovleff said that if he persisted in his refusal, he should have to use force, as his instructions were to remove him. There

was general consternation. Everyone thought that it was to Moscow that the Emperor would be taken, and who knew what might happen there? This was the most terrible time of all for the Empress. She was torn between her feelings as a wife and as a mother. She felt that she could not allow the Emperor to go alone. On the other hand, her boy lay dangerously ill, and the idea of leaving him in that state drove her nearly out of her senses. It was the only time that she completely lost her self-command, pacing up and down the room for hours in her perplexity. The Emperor's departure was imminent and some decision had to be taken.[1]

At last the Grand Duchess Tatiana forced her mother to come to a decision. "You cannot go on tormenting yourself like this," she said. The Empress summoned all her courage, and went to the Emperor to tell him that she had made up her mind to go with him. The Cesarevitch could be looked after by his sisters, and she felt she must be with the Emperor. The girls settled among themselves that the Grand Duchess Marie, who was the strongest, physically, of the sisters, should go with their parents. Olga Nicolaevna was to take charge of the house, Tatiana Nicolaevna was to look after her brother, Anastasia Nicolaevna was too young to be taken into account. Prince Dolgoroukoff had asked the Emperor which of the gentlemen should go with him, and the Emperor had chosen him. Dr. Botkine also appeared, carrying his well-known small black bag, and when he was asked why he had brought it, said that as he was, naturally, going with his patient (meaning the Empress), he might need it. The Imperial Family spent the rest of

[1] The Empress's maid, Toutelberg, told Judge Sokoloff, who was later appointed by Admiral Koltchak to inquire into the circumstances of the Imperial Family's disappearance, that the Empress had said to her: "It is the hardest moment in my life. You know what my son is to me, and I must choose between him and my husband. But I have made up my mind. I must be firm. I must leave my child and share my husband's life or death."—*Enquête judiciaire sur l'assassinat de la Famille Impériale Russe*, Nicolas Sokoloff

that day alone. The sick boy had to be prepared for his parents' leaving, and the Empress spent most of the time with him, trying to treat her departure in a casual way so as not to frighten him, and telling him that he and his sisters would soon follow her. In the evening the Household joined the Imperial Family at tea. The Grand Duchesses all sat as close to their mother as they could, looking the picture of despair. About three a.m. their Majesties took leave of their Household and the servants. About four some springless carts were drawn up before the main entrance. The one destined for the Empress had a hood, and into this she was lifted; Dr. Botkine said that it was impossible that she should travel in such discomfort —the carts had no seats—so some straw was brought from a pigsty to put at the bottom of the cart, over which some rugs and pillows were arranged. The Empress motioned to the Emperor to follow her, but Iakovleff said that he had to travel with him, and the Grand Duchess Marie got in beside her mother. Iakovleff stood at attention when the Emperor came out, and the sentry presented arms. Iakovleff was, on the whole, respectful in his manner to His Majesty, and was even considerate, insisting that the Emperor should take an extra coat. In the third *tarantas*, as the springless Siberian carts are called, Prince Dolgoroukoff and Dr. Botkine took their seats. In the fourth were Matveeff, an officer of the Tobolsk guard, and one of the Empress's maids, Anna Stepanovna Demidova. The Emperor's valet, Tchemodouroff, and a servant, Sednev, completed the party. A mounted escort, consisting of some of Iakovleff's men and a few of the Rifles, who had insisted on accompanying the Emperor, surrounded the carts and the whole convoy drove off at four a.m. at full speed, clattering over the streets in the dim, morning light. The three Grand Duchesses stook looking after them, and it was a long time before their lonely figures disappeared behind the open door.

The journey was terrible, and it can be imagined what the Empress suffered when she was rattled at full speed over the awful Siberian roads. These roads are shocking at the best of times, and just then were at their worst, for the snow and ice melted during the daytime, and froze again into hard lumps at night. The Empress sent me a line from Tjumen, saying that all her "soul had been shaken out." Several times wheels came off and broke, and the harness gave way.

They travelled all day, spending some hours at night in a peasant's house, where they slept on the camp-beds they had brought with them, the Emperor and Empress with their daughter in one room, the gentlemen in another. The ladies were nearly frozen. Someone who saw them at one of their stops said that when the Grand Duchess got out to arrange her mother's cushions, her hands were so cold that she had to rub her numbed fingers for a long time before she could use them at all. She and the Empress wore thin coats of Persian lamb suitable for motor-car driving in Petrograd. They had to get over several rivers, where the ice was so unsafe that they were obliged to cross by planks on foot. At one place the Emperor had to wade knee-deep in ice-cold water, carrying the Empress in his arms. The state in which they reached Tjumen can be imagined, yet the Empress begged Iakovleff to send an encouraging telegram to her children, saying that they had "arrived all well." At Tjumen a train was awaiting them. It seems likely that it was Iakovleff's original intention to take them to Moscow. There are two ways of reaching that city from Tjumen. The one westward, through Ekaterinburg, the other by going first eastward to Omsk, branching off from there *via* Tcheliabinsk. Iakovleff chose the latter to avoid Ekaterinburg, where there was an ultra-Red Soviet. They reached the station before Omsk safely, but the authorities at Omsk were evidently afraid that the prisoners might escape

further east and would not allow them to be taken beyond their town. Iakovleff had many discussions with the Omsk Soviet, and spoke direct to Moscow. As a result of the instructions he got, the train was turned back towards Ekaterinburg, which had evidently been warned of their arrival. When the train stopped outside the town, a large band of soldiers surrounded it. Iakovleff went to the local Soviet, and there, apparently, resigned his powers, and the Emperor and Empress were handed over to the Ural (Ekaterinburg) authorities. The Emperor, Empress and their daughter, with Dr. Botkine, the maid and the two men-servants were taken in motor cars to the house of a local engineer named Ipatieff where they were imprisoned. Prince Dolgoroukoff was taken to the prison in the town (April 30th).

The Empress was utterly weary in body and spirit. She was hardly able to stand when she left the car. She had had no news of Alexei Nicolaevitch. The letters she had written daily to her children had had no answer, and she was desperately anxious. Happily a telegram soon came from the Grand Duchess Olga Nicolaevna describing an improvement in the boy's health, but she never got most of the letters the children wrote her. Still she seems at first to have had hopes that the stay at Ekaterinburg would not be a long one, and her chief trouble seems to have been her children's absence and the idea of their journey.

The Ipatieff house at Ekaterinburg as it was when the Imperial family were under arrest from April to July, 1918.

CHAPTER XXXI

EKATERINBURG, APRIL TO JULY 1918

THE house at Ekaterinburg was much smaller than that at Tobolsk. It had belonged to a well-to-do engineer named Ipatieff, and had been requisitioned by the Soviet. Two days before the Imperial Family arrived, I was told it had been hastily got more or less into order, and a high wooden paling was put up all round it, so that only the upper panes of the windows could be seen from the street. The party had the use of three rooms : a bedroom, which was occupied by the Emperor, Empress and their daughter; a sitting-room, where Dr. Botkine and the men-servants slept at night; and a room, meant for the Emperor's dressing-room, in which the maid, Anna Demidova, slept on a camp-bed. The remainder of the house was occupied by the Kommissars and the guard. The furniture had belonged to the former owners. The Imperial Family could not realise at all where they were staying, as nothing could be seen from the windows except the gilt cross on top of the belfry of a church in the square opposite. There was a small garden belonging to the house, which, later, they were allowed to use at stated hours. They could not go freely in and out as they had done at Tobolsk. All the things they had brought with them were thoroughly searched. The men even wrenched the Empress's grey suède hand-bag rudely out of her hands, though she had only her heart-drops, pocket-handkerchief and smelling-salts inside it. This was the only time that the Emperor showed acute irritation. The rudeness to his wife

thoroughly roused him, and he said sharply to the Kommissar, that, up till now, they had at least been treated with common civility. The man retorted rudely that *they* were the masters now and could do as they pleased, and was so aggressive that the Empress had to pacify the Emperor for fear of causing trouble. From that time the valet Tchemodouroff[1] told me the Kommissars were always rude to them. Their Majesties' dinner was brought in to them from a Soviet restaurant. It was coarse food, and the Empress could scarcely touch it. It was brought at most irregular hours, when it occurred to the guard, and was sometimes delayed till three or four P.M. They often had no tea for breakfast, as the soldiers used up all the hot water. Supper consisted of the remains of the midday meal, warmed up by the maid. The servants had to sit at table with the Imperial Family, by order of the Kommissar. At first they refused to do this, out of respect for their masters, and agreed only at the Emperor's express command. There were neither tablecloths nor napkins, and only five forks for seven people. Dr. Botkine pleaded unsuccessfully for better food and for some comforts for the Empress, but his appeals were unheeded. Not only did the Kommissar and the guard help themselves to the dishes before they ever reached the Imperial table, but often one of them would come in during the meal and, pushing aside the Emperor, would pick some piece he fancied out of the dish with his fork, saying that by now they had had enough! The Imperial Family had to be up and dressed by 8.15 A.M., when the new Kommissar came to "inspect." He was a drunken workman called Avdeeff, from one of the factories near the town. He was rude and totally wanting in any consideration. The eight riflemen who had come with Iakovleff's men from Tobolsk were

[1] All the account of the life at Ekaterinburg I heard from this valet. He has died since I saw him.

imprisoned for several days in the basement of the Ipatieff house, and then sent back with their officer Matveeff to Tobolsk. The men now on guard were men from the Syssert and Zlokazov factories. The men forming the outer guard were often changed. The inner guard had been specially chosen from among the most militant Bolsheviks, and they spared the Emperor and Empress no vexation or unpleasantness. The doors between the rooms had been taken off their hinges, so that they might see all the rooms at one glance when they came in. They would appear at any moment, without warning. A sentry was posted at the door of the lavatory and followed the Empress and her daughter at every step. Their remarks were rude and disgusting, and Dr. Botkine's complaints to the Kommissar were ignored.

The little money they had brought with them was taken away, so that they could not get anything they needed. The only red-letter days for the Empress were the rare ones on which she got a small note from her children at Tobolsk. Holy Week came, but no church was allowed. They asked to be given fasting food, but could only get a little gruel for the Empress. On Maundy Thursday they put all their ikons on a table in the sitting-room, and at vesper-time the Emperor and Dr. Botkine read the Gospel for the day. Even now the Empress does not seem quite to have abandoned hope that, when the children joined them, they would be moved somewhere else and that things would improve.

The children, meanwhile, were leading a desperately anxious life at Tobolsk. Stories of the Emperor's treatment were repeated to them by the returned soldiers, and the future looked very black. Alexei Nicolaevitch's improvement was slow. His temperature was still high, and he was extremely weak from loss of blood and unable even to sit up in bed. Colonel Kobylinsky and his men were replaced on May 14th by a mixed guard of Letts and

sailors. The new-comers were a great deal more severe than their predecessors, who had been openly sympathetic to the children since their parents left. The stoker Khokhriakoff was nominally the chief, but it was evident that Rodionoff, who had replaced Kobylinsky, was the head man. He knew no pity, but, on the contrary, seemed to take pleasure in tormenting and humiliating those under his rule. He started the system of a daily roll-call. The Grand Duchesses had to assemble in the sitting-room and to reply to his question, " Are you Olga Nicolaevna ? Tatiana Nicolaevna, etc. ? " while he added, contemptuously, that there were so many of them he could not remember either their names or their faces ! Sentries were posted inside the house. All the doors had to be open. The servants were not allowed out. Nagorny once took a bunch of radishes with three lines written by the Cesarevitch to the doctor's son. The man was searched, and it was with the greatest difficulty that General Tatistcheff managed to persuade Rodionoff not to court-martial poor Nagorny.

At Easter a priest and four nuns were allowed to come for the Easter services, and the Grand Duchess Olga gave the Household the presents which the Empress had prepared. All the inhabitants of the town sent the young people gifts of food, and their Easter table was laden with Easter cakes (*Paschas*), etc.

Olga Nicolaevna was in a state of great anxiety. She longed to join her parents, for whose fate she trembled, and, on the other hand, she feared the move for her brother, both on account of his health and also for fear of what the move might lead to. However, the decision was not to rest with her. The river was by this time nearly free of ice, and the Kommissars seemed very anxious to get the children away as soon as possible, though Dr. Derevenko said it was still out of the question to move the Cesarevitch. On May 16th Alexei Nicolaevitch had no fever and felt

stronger. He implored the Grand Duchess Tatiana to allow him to sit up a little in an armchair. She gave in. He had not been allowed to do this before, as the Kommissars had said that, when he had been up for a few hours, he could be moved the next day, and the doctor thought he was still too weak to stand a long journey. As ill-luck would have it, the Kommissar, who as a rule never came at that time, appeared just as Alexei Nicolaevitch had got into his chair, and at once announced that they should all start on the morrow. Dr. Derevenko managed to have the journey postponed till May 20th, but even then the boy was extremely weak and not fit to travel, having been in bed since April 12th. The *Rouss* had just arrived with some German prisoners of war, and this was used for the journey to Tjumen. General Tatistcheff, Countess Hendrikoff, Mlle. Schneider, Dr. Derevenko, M. Gilliard, Mr. Gibbes, and myself, with thirteen servants and the Cesarevitch's nursery governess, A. A. Tegleva, made up the party. I had received Iakovleff's permission to join the rest of the Household, but Rodionoff would not allow me to live in the house on the plea of want of room, and I only joined the others on the *Rouss*. Rodionoff, Khokhriakoff, and their men formed our escort. The Governor's and Korniloff's houses were looted by them on their departure. Everything, whether belonging to the Imperial Family or not, was taken away, even to the horse and carriage that the Archbishop lent to take the children to the landing-stage. All these things, as well as most of the Imperial Family's own belongings, were divided by the men at Ekaterinburg as "spoil," some of it, as I saw myself, being taken to the Soviet. The Grand Duchesses were not allowed to shut the doors of their cabins. Guards were posted everywhere, even inside the dressing-rooms, whence we dislodged them with difficulty. When we were on deck, a man sat at the end of our benches, and we were obliged to speak very loudly in Russian, so that the

guard might be able to follow the conversation. It was fine, so the Cesarevitch was able to sit out during the day in a wheel-chair. At night Rodionoff locked him up in his cabin, much to the distress of Nagorny, who continually had violent altercations with Rodionoff. When the ship left the landing-stage the men for some unknown reason fired volleys with their machine-guns, but Khokhriakoff, who was more considerate than Rodionoff, came to the sick boy to tell him not to be frightened. There was delay at Tjumen, where the party arrived the next day, as the local Soviet wished to arrest everybody. After much parley a train was got together somehow, and we were all taken on board (May 22nd). Meanwhile, the news that the Emperor's children were in the town had spread, and a crowd gathered. Some ladies threw flowers at the children, but were rudely pushed aside by the soldiers. A mixed compartment in a second-class carriage was given to the Cesarevitch and his sisters, General Tatistcheff, Countess Hendrikoff, Mlle. Schneider and myself, as well as Dr. Derevenko, a maid, and Nagorny. Each of us was put in separately by armed soldiers. The tutors were put with the servants in a fourth-class carriage, which had no communication with ours. Happily, at the last moment, the Empress's page, Wolkoff, ran up and gave us a bottle of milk and some cold veal, otherwise the travellers would have had no food for two days. The milk was a godsend to the little Cesarevitch, and the others refused to have any so that he could drink it all. The carriage was inexpressibly filthy. No words can describe it, and the soldiers purposely did all they could to make it more impossible, jeering at our disgust. Here again all the doors had to be open, and sentries stood inside the carriages. We could exchange only brief, insignificant remarks. The Cesarevitch missed M. Gilliard very much. He felt ill, and it was difficult to draw his attention away from his depressing surroundings. He felt the humiliations that surrounded him intensely, and

the Grand Duchess Tatiana and I could only keep him contented by playing round games of cards with him all day. At last, on the night of May 23rd, we reached Ekaterinburg. We were not allowed to leave the train at once, however. Members of the local Soviet had to come and discuss matters with the Kommissars, and it was only on the next morning, between eight and nine, that the Imperial children were taken away. Some ill-favoured Kommissars and soldiers arrived, a line of *izvostchiks* (cabs) was drawn up, and the Grand Duchesses were led out of the carriage by armed soldiers. They were rudely ordered to carry their own luggage, and had to struggle alone with heavy bags and the three dogs they were leading, Nagorny being pushed aside roughly when he wanted to help. The Cesarevitch was carried out by Nagorny, and then the suite followed, one by one. The Grand Duchesses and the Cesarevitch were taken by the soldiers to the Ipatieff house to join their parents, while General Tatistcheff, Countess Hendrikoff, and Mlle. Schneider were taken to prison. I was imprisoned for a few hours in the train, and was then set free. I joined the tutors and servants in their fourth-class carriage, in which we were allowed to stay for eleven days. After this we received orders to leave the province of Perm (of which Ekaterinburg is the capital) within twelve hours. We had to comply, and never saw the Imperial Family again.

Nearly a month had passed (from April 26th to May 23rd) since parents and children had been parted. The Empress knew the children were leaving Tobolsk, but it was a joyful surprise to her that May morning when they walked in. The delight of being together again made them forget their hardships for the moment. Four of the servants who had come with the second party were brought to the house later in the day. These were the cook, Haritonoff, and his assistant, Leonide Sednev, Nagorny and a servant named Troup, to replace the

Emperor's valet, Tchemodouroff, who had fallen ill and been taken to the prison hospital. The Emperor asked for his suite to be allowed to join him, and particularly for M. Gilliard, who was indispensable to the Cesarevitch, but this was refused. Three rooms had been added to their accommodation. One was for the Grand Duchesses, another was used as a dining-room, and in the third the men-servants slept. They had also the use of the kitchen and bathroom, but firewood had to be collected for this, and it was very seldom that the men condescended to heat the water. Indeed, such a rare treat was it that the Empress noted the " bath days " in her diary. The house was very damp. No beds were at first provided for the new-comers, so the Grand Duchesses slept on rugs on the floor, the Grand Duchess Marie giving up her bed in her parents' room to her brother. The camp-beds were eventually brought from the train. Their other luggage was, however, taken to the Soviet and most of it never reappeared. Some things were taken to the Ipatieff house, but were put in the loft, where the prisoners could not get them, and were eventually looted by the soldiers. On the night after his arrival Alexei Nicolaevitch slipped in getting out of bed and hurt his knee badly. Dr. Derevenko was summoned, but the Kommissar Avdeeff only allowed him to enter the house on the express condition that he should not exchange a word with the Imperial Family, except on medical matters, threatening that he should not be allowed to visit his patient again if he infringed this rule. Medical men always had a privileged position even under the Soviet rule, and Dr. Derevenko lived at liberty in the town. Naturally he kept his promise, and on this account caused a great shock to the Empress. She did not know the conditions under which he had come and anxiously asked him about the fate of the ladies. The children had been expecting us to join them all day, as we had at all changes on the journey. Dr. Derevenko made a depre-

cating movement with his hands. The Empress took this to mean that we were condemned, and burst into a flood of tears. This was an added trial to her, and I do not know if she ever knew that we were still alive. Countess Hendrikoff and Mlle. Schneider did, indeed, later pay for their fidelity with their lives.

Alexei Nicolaevitch recovered slowly. His fall caused haemorrhage in the knee, which weakened him to such a degree that he was in bed for weeks. A priest who was allowed to come and say Mass, at the end of May, says that he was then so thin as to seem nearly transparent. The same priest said at the beginning of July that he looked stronger, but was still in his wheel-chair. Naturally, the bad food gave him little chance of recovery. Later on, the nuns of a convent near Ekaterinburg brought some milk and eggs for him every day, but what actually reached the prisoners is unknown, for in the Empress's diaries she mentions the difficulty of getting food for him. Avdeeff, the Commandant, was amenable to reason only when he was not drunk. Sokoloff, the judge who conducted the inquiry, says that all the witnesses declared that he took pleasure in refusing the Imperial Family's modest requests. After the children arrived, a second paling was added to the first one round the house. Later, the windows were painted, so that even the sky could be seen only through the topmost panes. No newspapers were allowed to reach the prisoners, and they received no letters. Dr. Derevenko was at first allowed to see his patient regularly, but these visits became fewer as time went on. Whenever he came a Kommissar kept close to him, to prevent his exchanging any remarks with anyone in the house. The faithful Nagorny, who had always looked after the Cesarevitch, was soon arrested, as was the second servant, Sednev. They were taken to prison, where both were shot.

When Alexei Nicolaevitch got better he had to be carried, as his knee had grown quite stiff, and Dr. Derevenko

was not allowed to treat it with electricity. This was one of the requests which was refused without any reason being given. The Grand Duchess Anastasia asked for a second pair of shoes out of one of the boxes in the loft, but was told that those she had would last the rest of her life.

This was still in the time of Avdeeff's rule. On the plea that he had allowed some mismanagement on the part of the soldiers (the Empress, in her diaries, seems to think that it was because he had allowed their belongings to be stolen), he was replaced at the beginning of July by a Jew named Jourovsky, a very spirit of evil. If Avdeeff's rule had been hard, Jourovsky's was harder. His first act was to order the prisoners to give up all their jewellery. All the gold they had, even to the chain on which some small ikons were hung over the Cesarevitch's bed, had already been taken away in Avdeeff's time. Very soon after their arrival Dr. Botkine had obtained permission for them to have an hour's outing in the small garden. In the height of summer, at the end of June, this time was increased to an hour and a half; but he could never get leave for the sick boy, or the Empress, to sit on the balcony, which ran outside their rooms; notwithstanding the fact that it was shut off from the street by the double line of palings, and that not only were there sentries outside, but that two soldiers were posted armed with machine-guns on the balcony itself. The heat in Ekaterinburg is almost tropical in June and July, and it was with the greatest difficulty that permission was obtained for a window to be open at night.

It was evident that the Soviet were terrified at the idea of their prisoners escaping. Alas, this was impossible, for who was there who could help them? The soldiers became more and more neglectful. In the Empress's diary (July 10th) she notes that for a couple of days they did not bring them their meals at all, and that the family had to live on the meagre supplies (mostly macaroni) that

the cook had brought from Tobolsk in May. Next day she hails with joy some eggs brought by the nuns "for baby," [1] but "only enough to put in his soup for six days."

The Grand Duchesses helped Demidova with the housework. They washed and ironed the linen, mended the clothes, washed up the plates, and took turns in reading to and amusing their brother. They seem to have taken part in the cooking, too, and on one occasion to have helped in baking bread—probably with some flour brought by the nuns. Sometimes the guards seem to have ordered the Grand Duchesses to play the piano for their amusement. The guard-room was so near the sitting-room that, with the open doors, the men could hear the music well from their quarters.

The Empress seems to have been physically very ailing all this time, and she lay, fully dressed, on her bed for most of the day. The Emperor also was ill in June, and was laid up for several days with fever and kidney trouble. These illnesses caused great complications when all were living at such close quarters, and when there was so much difficulty in getting medicine and suitable food. Still not a word of complaint was ever heard. In her diaries the Empress only mentions the daily happenings without any comment. She speaks of the blessing of having had Church services for the first time on May 24th. They had asked for this at Easter, but had been refused. A priest from a neighbouring church was sent for by the Commandant and officiated with a deacon, but they were not allowed to approach the Imperial Family. The Grand Duchesses sang the responses. Church service was again allowed on July 14th. All looked sad and dejected, and this time the young girls did not sing. This priest was the last reliable person to see the Imperial Family.

During the last week they seem to have heard movements of soldiers marching outside. The guards were

[1] The Empress still sometimes called her son by that name.

very nervous and redoubled their watchfulness. The Czecho-Slovak troops were approaching Ekaterinburg, but this the Imperial Family probably did not know. (The town was soon after taken by the Czechs.) The guards were said to have heard the Grand Duchesses singing sad Church music when they went their rounds.

The last entries in the Empress's diaries[1] can well explain the impression of sadness the priest got. Her short notes, in their bald statement of facts, give a poignant picture of these last days. On June 28th she wrote :

We heard, at night, the sentries under our rooms being ordered to keep a particularly vigilant and constant watch under our windows—they have again become very suspicious—since our window is open—and do not allow us even to sit on the window sill.

July 4. A new Commandant [the Jew, Jourovsky]. All the inner sentries are gone. (Probably one has discovered that they have taken all our things out of the loft)—the Commandant and his young assistant made us show all our jewels we had on and the younger one noted all down and then they were taken from us. Why? For how long? Where?—I do not know—they left me only two bracelets from Uncle Leopold [the late Duke of Albany] which I cannot take off, and left each of the children the bracelets we gave them, and which cannot be slipped off, also N's engagement ring, which he could not take off. They took away our keys from our boxes in the loft, which they had *still left* us—but promised to return them. Very hot, went early to bed, as I was frightfully tired and had pains in the heart.

July 5. The Commandant came with our jewels, sealed them up in our presence and left them on our table. He will come every day to see that we have not opened the parcel. At 10.30 A.M.—Workmen have appeared outside and put iron bars in front of our open windows. They certainly always fear we shall climb out or get into touch with the guard!

Being so completely cut off from the outer world, the Empress was still spared the full realisation of how the

[1] The diaries were originally written in English, but have been translated into German by Dr. Seraphim, who publishes them in his book, *Die Tragedie der Zarenfamilie*. I have re-translated them into English.

clouds had thickened, and mercifully seems to have had no premonition of the approaching tragedy. She was sincere in her belief that all was for the best, and must have hoped to the last that the children would be spared :

July 16. Every day the Commandant comes into our rooms 8 P.M. Suddenly Lewka Sednew [the 15-year-old kitchen boy] was told he could see his uncle and flew away—would like to know if this is true and if we shall ever see the boy again? Played bezique with N. 10½ to bed—15° of heat.

These are the last lines ever written by the Empress Alexandra Feodorovna. The curtain falls on the life of a great and noble character—a woman whose love for her husband and his country and whose trust in the mercy of God were stronger than the fear of death.

Three hours later the dark tragedy of Ekaterinburg is believed to have occurred. . . .

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